

# socialist review

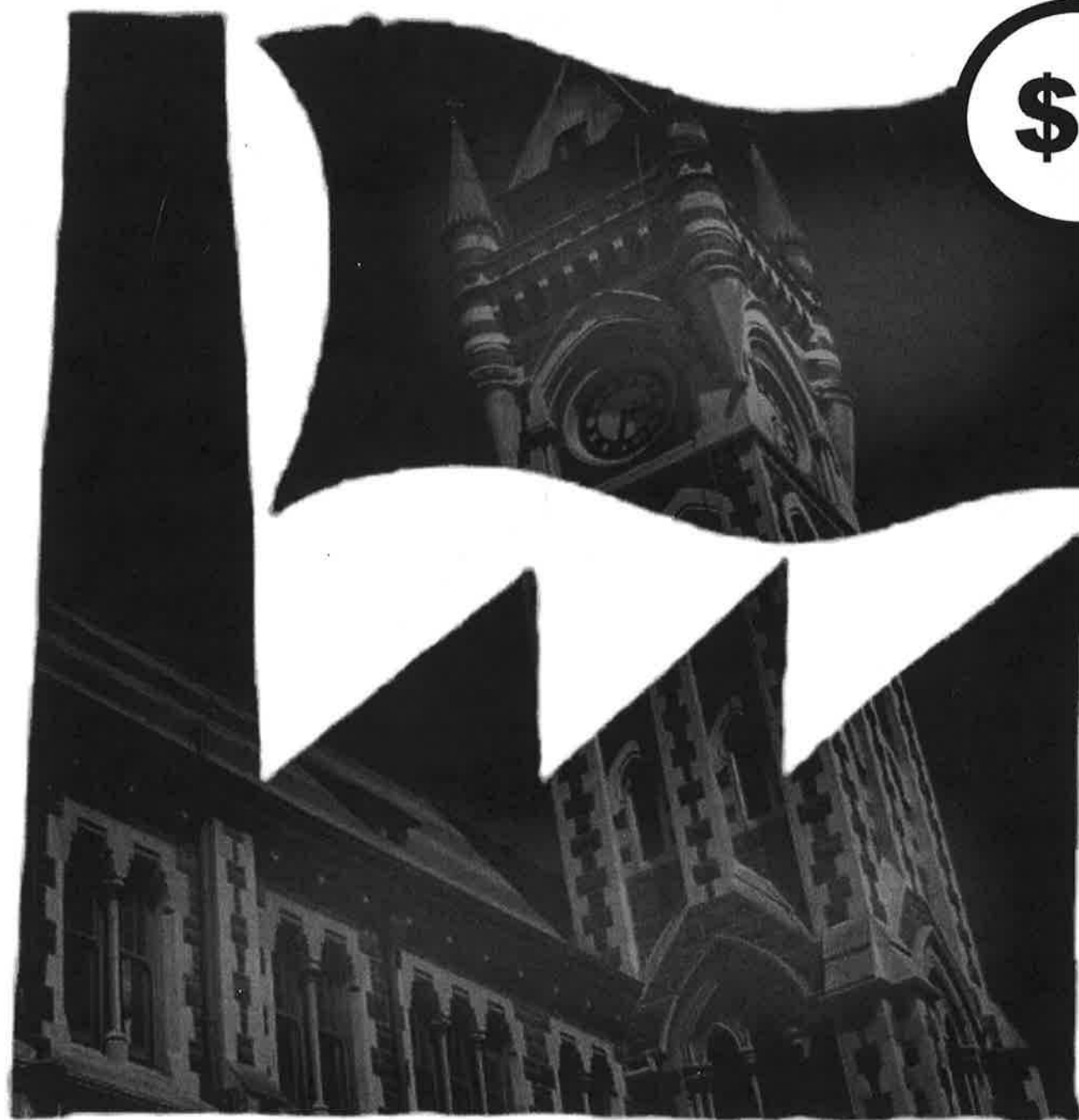
Issue 31

For a democratic and socialist alternative

March 2010

## The Degree Factory

**\$2**



**Nepal**  
Revolution

**Tertiary Education**  
Its changing shape

**Haiti**  
Invasion

# WHERE WE STAND

## **Socialism**

Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need. Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over its production or distribution. A new society can only be built when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and create a new state in which they will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

## **Workers' Power**

Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want. Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power - a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils. China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have nothing to do with socialism. They are repressive state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers against every ruling class.

## **Revolution Not Reformism**

Despite the myth of parliamentary democracy, the structures of parliament, the army, the police and the judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class majority. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers. There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

## **Internationalism**

Workers in every country are exploited by capitalism, so the struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We oppose everything that divides workers of different countries. We oppose all immigration controls. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles.

## **Liberation From Oppression**

We fight for democratic rights. We are opposed to the oppression of women, Maori, Pacific

Islanders, gays and lesbians. These forms of oppression are used to divide the working class. We support the right of all oppressed groups to organise for their own defence. All these forms of liberation are essential to socialism and impossible without it.

## **Tino Rangatiratanga**

We support the struggle for tino rangatiratanga. Maori capitalists and politicians have no interest in achieving tino rangatiratanga for working class Maori. The Government and corporate warriors' approach to Treaty claims has benefited a Maori elite while doing little for working class Maori. Tino rangatiratanga cannot be achieved within capitalism. It will only become a reality with the establishment of a workers' state and socialist society.

## **Revolutionary Organisation**

To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by day-to-day activity in the mass organisations of the working class. We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests. We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions. We are beginning to build such a party, linking the ideas of revolutionary socialism to workers' struggles against the system. If you agree with our ideas and want to fight for socialism, we urge you to join us.

# GET INVOLVED!

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# An attack on student unions

**R**oger Douglas has reared his ugly head with another attack on unions. The free-market fanatic is getting tired though and he's picked what he hopes is a weak target – students.

His usual right-wing blather about individual freedom and responsibility is used to cover up a much simpler motive – destroying student unions.

Douglas' misleadingly named Education (Freedom of association) Bill will revoke the right of students to decide the fate of their own organizations, force them to pay even more to university management, and deprive them of vital services and representation.

Despite the justified feeling of some students that the union executives are inept and amateurish, we need to look deeper to see their enduring value and the central role student unions can play in defending public education.

Douglas' bill seeks to undermine student unions by cutting off the influx of members.

Under the present system, students are automatically a member of their association when they enrol at a university.

People who suffer financial hardship or who are ideologically opposed to unions to membership may opt out. However, the levies of ideological opponents must still be paid, but to a charity of their choice.

Individual associations have the ability to switch to an 'opt-in' system through a referendum which must be called if 10% of students sign a petition for that purpose. Douglas' bill removes this choice from associations, and forced them to become 'opt-in'.

Three clear results can be predicted. Firstly, income will plummet. The loss of revenue from membership dues will mean a rapid financial crippling of student unions. They will be unable to run their services with the reduced income.

Secondly, administration costs will rise. Unions will suddenly have to make sure that only their members are able to use student union facilities, requiring, for example, ID checks at the doors of student-run gyms, as well as all the paperwork needed to administrate such a system.

Thirdly, advertising costs will rise. The unions will be forced to put a large part of their reduced finances into advertising and trying to entice students to join the union.

Voluntary student unionism (VSU) was passed in Australia by the Liberals in 2006, despite widespread protest by student unions themselves. The results of this in just a few short years have been devastating. Funding has fallen by almost 95%, over 1000 jobs have been lost, with more losses expected. 36% of unions have been forced to stop all maintenance of their facilities, meaning that they will be practically useless in time to come. Nationally, 261 vital services, such as childcare and assistance for international students have been shut down. Half of all sporting groups have been forced

into university management, setting them up for the same fee rises and cost-cutting that uni management has done so well in education for the past 20 years. Price rises within the unions have outstripped inflation, and in some cases have doubled, meaning students are again cut off from services that were previously freely available. And in the end, due to services being taken over by the profit-mongering universities, the increase in fees has more than consumed any financial gain by students no longer paying union dues. In the end, the effect is clear, students are now paying much, much more for far, far less.

Student Unions are vitally important because they provide essential services and are one of the best platforms to push for political activity. In the 1980s, student activism was a perpetual thorn in Roger Douglas' side, and students were at the forefront of the movements against the US invasion of Vietnam and the 1981 Springbok tour. Student unions provided lively forums for organising and discussion. In France in 2006, student associations were able to lead a massive protest movement that defeated a pro-business employment law. The students' organisations were able to coordinate nationwide action that drew support from right across the French working class.

It is true that student activism is at a historic low in New Zealand and this is reflected in the poor calibre of student politicians, who too often seem more interested in petty, bureaucratic infighting than representing students' interests. It is too easy for the

university management to co-opt or sideline student politicians, and student activists should be wary of getting too involved.

However, despite our criticism of student politicians, we support the associations wholeheartedly.

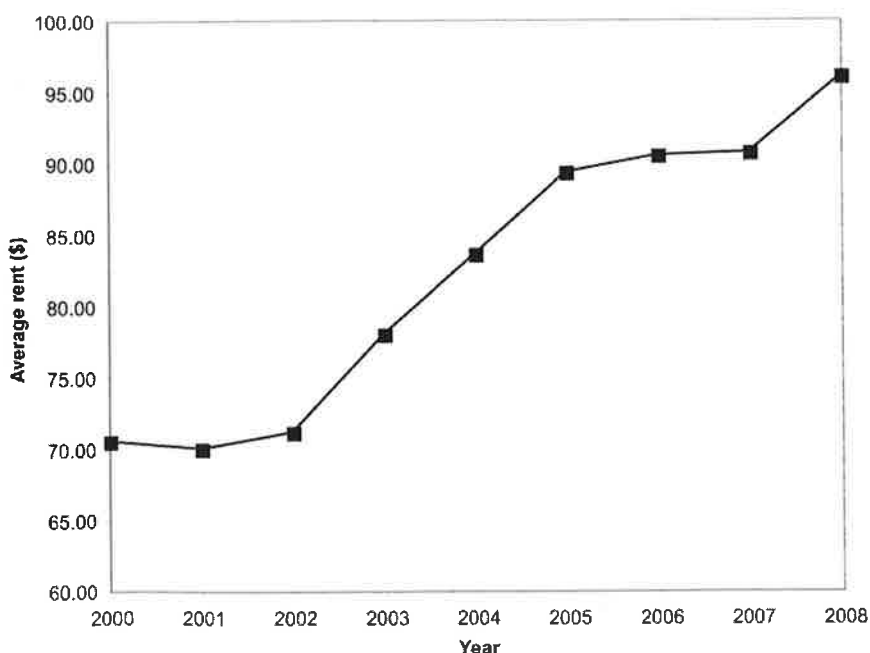
We do not abandon trade unions in the downturn, as we see them as being vital to defending workers' living standards. Similarly, we cannot abandon student unions, if we hope to see students once again taking their fate into their hands and fighting for free education and progress on a national stage.

Unfortunately, the problems with the state of student unions are precisely why this issue has come up now. The Student Associations cannot, in their present state, put together a movement strong enough to stop the government in its tracks. While there is no guarantee that the bill will pass – National seems to be supporting it only as lip-service to ACT, this is an issue largely out of our hands.

What we can do, however, is build to prevent it happening again. We need to take a renewed strength into student unions, to actually make them act as unions. We need to make students understand that the university is a powerful, multi-million dollar company, and if we want to hope to fight against them, fight against fee rises, fight against staff cuts, we have to organise together in student unions.

James Gluck

## EDUCATION ACTION GROUP RENT ON THE RISE.



In the past eight years, the average rent for a room in Dunedin has grown from \$71 to more than \$95. Very few student flats even come close to World Health Organisation guidelines for human habitation. But the slumlords continue to squeeze every last cent from students. We need to fight this!



# The fight for free education

## Protest timeline

- 1932 100s of Auckland students sign up as 'special constables' to beat up striking workers
- 1967 Protests against US invasion of Vietnam intensify
- 1969 HART (Halt All Racist Tours) founded by Auckland University
- 1971 2000-strong protest pushes back first Otago 'code of conduct'
- 1979 Teacher and student protests up to 11,000 strong force National to reverse education cuts
- 1981 Widespread protest against Springbok Tour. VUWSA claims ¾ of students hit the streets
- 1983 Maori students demanding a marae occupy Auckland Uni
- 1989 More than 20,000 students – a third of the student population – march against fees
- 1993 Armoured police run riot at Otago registry protest
- 1996 Polytech lecturers strike and win first pay rise in seven years; students occupy Lincoln, Otago, Auckland Uni and College of Education, Victoria, Massey, and Northland Polytech.
- 1997 74 arrests at Wellington demonstration
- 1998 Massey registry occupation
- 1999 Labour elected – student union bureaucrats apparently see no further need for protest

***There's a myth out there that student life is one long party, that student 'riots' like the Undy 500 disturbances are the tantrums of the privileged brats and the demand for free education is a middle-class attempt to take more tax money for themselves. The reality is quite different. Tertiary education has become a degree factory churning out skilled labour for capitalism.***

One hundred years ago, tertiary education was only for the elite - only 0.4% of the population attended university. However, in 2008, more than 630,000 New Zealanders, or 14.5% of the adult population, participated in formal tertiary study, including industry training. Tertiary education is big business. The Government invests nearly \$4 billion each year and universities are major employers. In Dunedin, the University of Otago is by far the biggest employer, with almost 4000 staff and more than 19,000 students.

The massive expansion of tertiary education is part of the expansion of education in general. In the mediaeval Europe, education was a tightly-guarded privilege of the Church and aristocracy. The vast bulk of the population was illiterate and the language of science and philosophy was Latin. The struggle for human liberation has been bound up at every stage with the struggle for public education.

However, education has also been used by elites to indoctrinate their subjects and to upskill their workers.

While Otago University taught only philosophy, maths and classics when it opened in 1871, it introduces mining studies in 1872 to provide expertise for the booming gold industry. Some people idealise the era when university education was not determined by the market but classical education was not democratic. It served to provide a common, exclusive culture for a small elite.

But it was not until the 1950s that universities broke away from the classical model and embraced capitalist industry. Tertiary education changed dramatically in the 1960s and '70s as the economy demanded more highly trained workers, particularly in areas like health and education. Universities expanded and polytechnics were introduced. Students are no longer just doctors and lawyers-in-waiting and nowadays, a degree is no guarantee of a middle-class life.

Student numbers have grown throughout the post-war period, especially in the 1990s, when despite massive fee hikes, unemployment forced thousands into retraining or 'upskilling' – a trend that continued in the last decade. Auckland University's roll jumped by 10,000 (from 28,092 to 38,551) between 2000 and 2008 alone.

However, this growth in education was partly driven by high unemployment through the 1990s. Also, there is mounting evidence that higher fees are making tertiary education harder for working class people to achieve.

## The middle class argument

One of the main myths of capitalism is that the middle class expands along with the growth of capitalism. The reality is that while capitalism creates a more educated workforce, many previously privileged professions, such as teachers, become proletarianised – people lose control over their

# CHANGING SHAPE OF EDUCATION

working lives and wages fall relatively. Nonetheless, the ruling class encourages white collar workers to identify not with blue-collar workers, but with upper class professionals like lawyers and doctors. This allows governments to drive a wedge between sections of the working class. This is exactly what Labour did in 1989 when they introduced user pays for education. Labour pitted students against kindergartens, saying students were "middle class" and it was unfair they should be supported from workers' taxes. They claimed that loans meant fees would not be a barrier for poorer students and that education conferred a "private benefit" the public should not pay for. This concern for working people was a sham, as Labour's had given millions in tax breaks to the rich and introduced GST – a flat tax that hits working people hardest.

This is not to say higher fees have no effect on working class kids' access to tertiary education – especially universities. They do. In 1988, just over half of university students came from working class backgrounds; by 1996, a large number of students still came from working class backgrounds but the majority were from professional or managerial backgrounds. Maori and Pacific Islanders have been hit hard. Maori first-year enrolments fell 28% between 1994 and '97. Pacific Island enrolments fell 25% in just one year, from '96 to '97.

Students are however, workers as well. According to the 2007 Student Income and Expenditure Survey commissioned by the NZUSA (New Zealand Union of Students' Associations), 90% of tertiary students partake in paid work whilst studying. This figure comprises 64% of students in regular work, and 36% in casual employment. 58% of students work during the Christmas break, and 64% during other university holidays.

Nor are university graduates necessarily well paid. Only a small minority move into lucrative jobs. The fair way to deal with this private benefit is not to tax all students, but to tax the highly paid graduates. Helen Clark's Labour government had a great opportunity to do just that, as the wealth of the richest New Zealanders soared over the last decade. Instead, Labour in government presided over year after year of fee increases.

## Funding falls

A better educated workforce is essential to lift productivity, which New Zealand has consistently been falling behind in. But Labour and National, keen to preserve profit rates and the salaries of the super-rich, are unwilling to pay for education.

The New Zealand Union of Student Associations (NZUSA) has calculated that the government share of university funding fell from 73% in 1991 to 42% in 2002. When Labour Government education minister Pete Hodgson boasted education funding had increased by 87% in the 15 years to 2006, the New Zealand Vice-Chancellor's Committee hit back.

"Between 1991 and 2006, university student numbers virtually doubled – from around 88,000 to nearly 170,000. During those 15 years, funding increased at a much slower rate, meaning that funding per student declined when adjusted for inflation and measured in constant dollars," Professor Roger Field, chair of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee, said.

"On a per full-time equivalent student basis, measured in 2006 constant dollars, funding has



**Last year's Undie 500 ended worse than ever before; not only were there smashed bottles left lying on Castle St but blood as well.**

**What started as a traditional weekend party, which has been happening for years, and will likely continue despite the DCC's and the Uni, turned into a bitter fight between the police and the students.**

**The police are meant to be a public force to ensure security, even an example to society. When they turned up on Castle street in full anti-riot gear, waving their batons and throwing teargas and pepper spray they set an example of confrontation that students were quick to copy. Every year the police are given new, improved gear to control demonstrations and the public 'disorder'. Much of this equipment comes from research conducted in military laboratories where they develop solutions to stain skin and 'non-lethal' chemical weapons. A recent product of the police-military research labs is the taser gun. This 'non-lethal' weapon has proven unsafe in practice. Amnesty reported 160 deaths between 2000 and 2006 in the US. In Dunedin, police will be armed with tasers from March as part of a national arms upgrade, which will see 700 tasers distributed to police. Tasers fire harpoon-like barbed projectiles, which stick in the victim's flesh and deliver a 50,000 volt electric shock. Another weapon being developed by the US military is the ADS (Active Denial Systems), which directs high-frequency microwave radiation and "causes a burning sensation on the subject's skin".**

**These weapons, as well as the more usual, and equally unsafe, rubber bullets, tear gas, pepper spray, are designed to allow the police or military to disperse unarmed crowds. Where once, arms spending focused on lethal force, up to and including the power to destroy the entire planet, since the end of the Cold War there have been fewer wars on the scale of Vietnam but more so-called humanitarian interventions - like the abortive US invasion of Somalia - where relatively small numbers of well-armed western troops face not armies but unarmed civilians.**

**New Zealand is not Somalia and the police are not the US marines but the problem of disproportionate numbers remains. The area around the University of Otago now houses tens of thousands of young people crammed into century-old damp cold flats and treated as cash cows by the University bosses, the DCC and the slumlords. They are blamed for having no sense of responsibility but are given no sense of ownership over their living conditions or work - apart from the fake choice between one scummy flat and another or between one overcrowded class and another.**

**This unacceptable situation is the status quo - normality - and the status quo is what the police are sworn to protect. The authorities give police license to actively attack people in demonstrations, campaigns and public gatherings with the excuse of protection or control. Now if the police are meant to protect the public, why are they allowed to research how military weapons can be put into use against unarmed crowds?**

**The solution is simple. Though they may be meant to protect our interests, they in fact protect the interests of government, the university bosses, the DCC and the slumlords. An example is the behaviour of the DCC and the Otago University in regard to the Undie 500. Even though there have been attempts to organize it through concerts thus making it a legal event, the DCC instead issued a liquor ban comprising half the city with continuous and strict police controls. What is worse, the University's authorities backed up this plan, going against the interests of the students. Truck-loads of riot police is the best the authorities can come up with for a rational response to the problems faced by students. The students' solution? Fight back against the invading force.**

Daniel Benson



# CHANGING SHAPE OF EDUCATION

## Fees Timeline

- 1871 First university (Otago) opens, subjects include philosophy, classics, and mathematics
- 1939 Only 6000 university students nationwide
- 1955 10,000 students nationwide
- 1959 Parry Report recommends a move away from "classical" education towards industry and managerial training
- 1960 14,547 students; first polytechnic
- 1973 11 polytechnics
- 1979 National introduces \$1500 fees for international students
- 1986 Labour cuts top tax rate from 66c in the dollar to 48c
- 1988 Labour cuts top tax rate to 33c; increases 'admin cost' by 80% from \$80, Phil Goff announces the end of free tertiary education
- 1989 Average fees \$125
- 1990 Labour introduces \$1250 fees for domestic students, up to \$24,000 fees for international students
- 1994 Todd Report introduces "private benefit" argument
- 1995-2000 Otago axes six Arts departments
- 1996 Otago physio students charged full fees of \$14,000 for final year
- 1997 Auckland University sells naming rights for research centre to BellSouth
- 1999 Average fees \$3220
- 2000 Otago "Centre for Innovation" provides privatised research, student debt \$3 billion
- 2008 630,000 tertiary students nationwide; Student Code of Conduct introduced at Otago; student debt passes \$10 billion

actually dropped from \$10,932 in 1991 to \$9089 in 2006.

"Universities therefore stand by their claim made yesterday that they are now losing \$230 million a year in real terms compared to their position 15 years ago."

## Vice Chancellors

The vice-chancellors main beef with the government though, is that the cap on fees means they cannot pass the cost onto students. These bureaucrats are more than happy to grow fat on the fees and funding – in 2008 the 30-odd tertiary CEOs took something between \$7million and \$10 million in fees. Since 2008, their annual salaries have only increased. David Skegg, CEO of Otago has cracked the half a million mark (earning more than \$530,000), topped only by Auckland Uni's boss, who is on more than \$560,000.

In the past, the student unions believed the



**Student protest:** When New Zealand joined the US invasion of Vietnam in 1965, opposition to war took a radical turn. In this 1967 protest, students march up Molesworth Street towards Parliament, carrying a symbolic coffin. In the worldwide revolutionary wave of 1968 and after, students were often on the front line.

university bosses could be convinced to support the campaign for free education but this was naivety. University managers are bought and paid-for by members of the ruling class. They are tied socially and professionally to the most powerful businesspeople and politicians. Their careers are built on privatising education and depend on slavish loyalty.

## Authoritarian universities

As universities have become transformed from playgrounds for the children of the ruling class into degree factories, the nature of education has changed. Instead of training in abstract, critical thinking that was useful for running businesses or the country, education has become more vocational and more tightly regulated. To meet demand for skilled labour, class sizes have grown and managerial models imported from the production-line have stressed output.

Universities today are more like corporations. A handful of overpaid bureaucrats and star professors enjoy fat salaries, while working conditions for many lecturers have become worse as pay stagnates and terms of employment become more precarious.

Students are the raw material in this production line and graduates the finished product, ready to sell their labour to employers. This new model of education requires a new management model. Students and staff no longer have the sense of community and mutual obligation that characterized universities in the old days of elite education. The corporate model breaks students into individuals who purchase units of education, which is delivered by staff members who are pitted against each other in a struggle for resources and job security. This state of affairs is set to worsen. The Ministry of Education warned in its Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015 that: "Due to constrained government resources, the tertiary education sector will need to live within its means and do more with less. To

encourage efficient and high quality provision, high performing providers will attract more resources, particularly through performance-linked funding."

The model the university looks to – naturally enough – is a police state. This after all is the form of institution that capitalism has perfected, in its hospitals, jails, armies, and prisons. Rather than a collegial environment where people work together to advance their own knowledge and human knowledge in general, universities are becoming more authoritarian. The exam system, the stress of assignments and competitive grading are based on a top-down model of education that curbs the dynamic, questioning interaction with reality that is the basis of the scientific method. The code of conduct and the campus cops are the disciplinary accompaniment to a wasteful education system.

## The future of education

Short of a catastrophic collapse of human civilisation, the need for educated workers will only increase. The question remains – who will pay for this education? Sterile bean-counting is a waste of time that disguises an attempt to squeeze more wealth from working people. Education transforms the economy as it transforms individuals. The demand for free education is no more a middle-class demand than the demand for primary or secondary education. We argue that just as education is a necessity for a modern economy, it should be a basic human right.

The only way to win this is to organise militant democratic staff and student unions, firstly, to stop fee rises and, ultimately, to take control of the degree factory.

Andrew Tait

with acknowledgement to Dave Colyer and Grant Brookes' "Students and the Education Factory"

# Student unions: worth defending

**When students first start university, they are not quite sure what a student association is, or what is actually does.**

University students' associations are responsible for organising events and gigs, such as the Orientation Week shows. They provide students with a wide range of support, such as counseling, mediation, and tutorials. In Otago, OUSA owns the University Book Shop, the only store in town to stock specialist text books. It helps to run UNIPOL (the local student gym), the university rowing club, and Clubs and Societies Centre, where students can participate in a wide range of activities, such as Italian cooking, learning Spanish, wine-tasting, karate, chess, even dungeons and dragons. AUSA in Auckland owns the book shop, bFM, the main Café and more. AUSA boasts that it is the only voluntary union in the country and claims to be free to join. However, its website admits it is funded by the university (to which students pay fees) and is only able to offer so many services because it "predominantly survives off money from its businesses that have been built up over the past". Student associations are living proof of the power of collective bargaining. By paying the union dues you get access not only to the benefit of belonging to a

collective but also to all of the resources that have been built up over the past century. All of this could be lost if Roger's bill becomes law.

Experience from Australia suggests that this is the case. A 2007 study by Australian University Sport (AUS) and the Australasian Campus Union Managers' Association (ACUMA) found that 1000 jobs were slashed. Funding for sports was slashed by 40%. Perhaps most ironically, "[p]rices charged to students for use of services and facilities have in general increased materially since on-set of VSU".

## Freedom of Choice?

But what about freedom of choice? For fanatical neoliberals such as Rodger Douglas, it is important that individuals are able to select what type of organisations that they belong to. Yet we should not be deluded that there is anything progressive about voluntary student association. This bill will make campus life much worse.

Roger Douglas and his cronies instituted a harsh neo-liberal regime in New Zealand in the 1980s. Many workers were forced to join unions, until a law change made it optional for everyone. As a result, union membership plummeted from around 50%, to around 25% today. Workers who believed that they would be better off with voluntary unionism were naïve. The unions in New Zealand are much weaker today than they should be. Wages have declined or stagnated for the majority of

workers over last 25 years. As individuals, workers and students are weak. Yet together, they have the strength to take on the system to achieve real wins.

Furthermore, all members of society are forced to pay for things that they do not wish to. As Dom Knight wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald "No-one seriously objects to the government funding Olympic athletes, or running an art gallery, or paying for community centers, so why is it any worse when a university or a student union does it? The notion that this is somehow unfair, because some of the money invested theoretically comes out of other students' pockets, is very shortsighted."

## What can you do?

If you are a worker or a student, you can help to shut down this bill. Talk to your friends and your flatmates about why VSM will be a disaster. If you want a campus in which has more to offer than a lecture theatre, then you have to be prepared to fight for it. Don't let neoliberals like those in the ACT party make our lives more difficult. Best of all, use the student association as an organizing centre – write letters or articles on VSM for your student magazine, encourage your elected representatives to take action, build an education action group on your campus to spread the word and take protest action.

Reece Wright

# The white-collar working class

The myth that white collar workers are not part of the working class remains as strong as ever.

White collar workers such as office workers, teachers and nurses make up a large section of the workforce. While in some cases, they can earn more than blue collar workers, many earn less than mechanics, builders and other tradespeople, white collar workers face the same struggle to make ends meet.

But in the last few decades, some white collar trade unions like the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) and the NZ Nurses Organisation (NZNO) have been the most militant and organised. These unions not only stand up for their members, they also defend public health and education and raise wages across the economy by setting higher benchmarks for pay.

Under capitalism, workers' jobs change all the time. The nature of white collar jobs has changed massively over the last 100 years. Clerical workers in the 19th century were regarded as middle class. Their pay, status and even dress made them more akin to managers. A clerical job was a prized job and was usually a lifetime post. No clerical worker thinks that today.

The growth of white collar jobs throughout this century has been accompanied by the growth in the number of women workers, who are often paid less. It is no coincidence that just as the number of women students has finally matched that of men at universities (and in some cases, such as Otago and Auckland universities, outnumbered men) pay for



"We're tunnelling out after lunch—pass it on."

graduates has declined relative to pay for (overwhelmingly male) tradespeople.

Over the last 40 years office work has become increasingly deskilled and dependent on machinery. Work has become boring and repetitive. The introduction of costly technology (computers, faxes and photocopiers) has changed the pattern of work inside the office.

Investment in machines means that white collar jobs are no longer nine to five. Many offices are now open 24 hours a day. Certainly, in terms of pay, an office worker is part of the working class. Computer technology also acts as a hidden foreman. It is used by management to record and monitor how much

work a worker does.

Clerical work has taken on more and more characteristics of manual labour. Call centres have become the cotton mills of the 21st century. Advances in telecommunications have allowed multinational corporations to centralize all of their administration, and in many cases to outsource it to cheap labour countries like India. Cadbury's Dunedin factory's pay is no longer administered here – it has been outsourced to the Philippines.

These changes have led to what has been called the "proletarianisation" of clerical workers. Increasingly white collar workers are joining unions and going on strike. Today unions with many white collar members, such as the PPTA and NZNO are as large and organised as their manual counterparts, if not larger. White collar workers are on strike as often as any other group.

It suits the ruling class to pretend that white collar workers are not working class. Bosses want white collar workers to identify with the mythical "middle class", instead of the working class. Magazines like "The Listener" savagely attack organised workers like the teachers, in the interests of well-heeled professional 'mums and dads'.

Campaigns like the Unite petition to raise the minimum wage to \$15 encourage white collar workers instead to identify with the rest of the working class and to take an interest in the whole of society, not just their suburban backyard.

# Unite shows how to organise

The Unite Union is perhaps the most radical union in New Zealand at the moment. Many other unions for example tend to be run by boring Bureaucrats. Take for example the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union. It used to be run by Andrew Little, who used this position to secure himself the position of President of the Labour Party. Bureaucrats like these don't really want to rock the boat, as they are concerned about their own future.

The Unite Union has a completely different approach to organising the working class. It is staffed by some of the most experienced activists from Aotearoa. It has been extremely successful, as it has recruited thousands of workers in the hospitality. The hospitality industry is notoriously difficult to organise. There is a high turnover of staff. Many younger workers are stereotyped as being too feckless to worry about joining a union. Yet these workers have rallied behind Unite to take on some of New Zealand's largest corporate bullies, such as McDonalds. The Super-size My Pay Campaign was successful in abolishing youth rates.

The current Unite campaign is to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Unite, with other

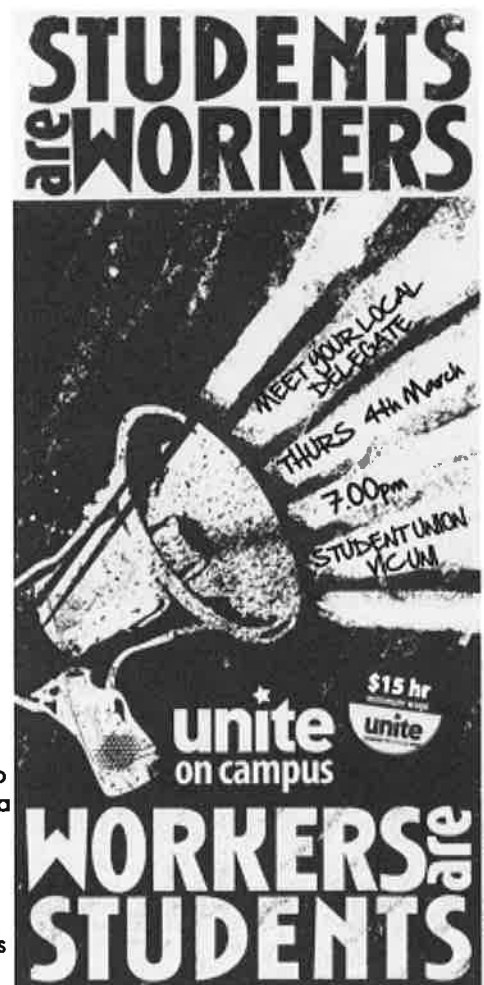
groups such as the International Socialist Organisation, the Workers Party and Socialist Aotearoa, have been active in taking these petitions out to the streets every weekend. It would be rare to find another union, or even the Labour Party, to bother to engage with the public in this way. The petition has been signed by over 100 000 people across the country.

Furthermore, the Unite Union has courage. New Zealand has been hit hard by the recession, with the latest statistics suggesting that unemployment is now at a ten year high. Many other unions do not want to threaten the bosses at this stage, as they want to do 'everything to preserve jobs'. This is complete nonsense. We should be fighting for higher wages in a recession, just as we should be prepared to fight for them when the economy is growing. The 25 cent an hour wage rise from John Key is an insult. He is a multi-millionaire, and has no right to tell to accept a few crumbs from the table. You should get involved with the \$15 an hour campaign. Ordinary people can take on the system and win, if they are prepared to work hard and organise.

Reece Wright

## Unite Clubs on Campuses

Unite is coming to a campus near you! There are 200,000 students and the union aims to get 50,000+ to sign to set up Unite Clubs on campuses to help the campaign and build a base amongst students who are pro-union and pro-worker. For the first week Unite supporters will set a table up to sign students up for the club and get petitions signed. In the second week, meetings will be held for interested students, clubs formed and plans laid to visit each class to circulate the petition. Electoral enrolment forms will also be distributed. By the end of March, Unite hopes to have passed 200,000 names. Unite is planning to build clubs in UoA, AUT, UNITEC, Victoria, Otago, Canterbury, Waikato, WIT, Rotorua, MIT, Massey, Albany etc. If you want to help set up a Unite Club on your campus, contact Joe at 029 44 55 702 or email [joseph@unite.org.nz](mailto:joseph@unite.org.nz)



# Minimum wage: truth and lies

**The Prime Minister admitted in February he could not live on the minimum wage. By Mike Treen, Unite national director.**

He also claimed that increasing the minimum wage to \$15 would lead to another 8000 people losing their jobs.

His Minister of Labour Kate Wilkinson supported the claim that the removal of youth rates has led to an increase in youth unemployment.

The only claim that is true in these recent statements is that John Key couldn't live on the minimum wage – because no one can. John Key is so rich that he doesn't claim his official salary and allowances of \$565,000 a year. But it is useful to see how the tax changes he has signalled would affect official his income of \$10,865 a week or \$271.60 an hour for a 40 hour week.

A reduction in the top tax rate from 38 cents to 33c for income over \$70,000 a year will give John Key an extra \$543 a week. This is more than a

minimum wage worker can earn before tax in a year working full-time. If the top rate goes down to 30 cents he will get an extra \$800 a week in the hand.

But there is more . . . because John Key says he wants to help the working poor he will cut the marginal tax rates on incomes below \$70,000 a year. That means everyone earning more than \$70,000 get a boost to their income from these cuts as well.

But what about his other claims. The alleged loss of 8000 jobs comes from the government's advisors in the Labour Department. They claimed an increase to \$15 now would lead to the loss of between 5,000 and 8000 jobs. With a labour force of 2.1 million jobs this is actually margin of error stuff. . .

Instead of using a model for an economy that does not exist, we can use the actual changes that have occurred in New Zealand over the last decade. When Labour was elected in 1999 the minimum wage for someone under 20 years of age was \$4.20 an hour. The adult rate was \$7.00. The previous National government had also believed higher minimum wages were bad for business (or at least their business mates) so had only increased it by 87 cents an hour during their 9 years in power.

The youth minimum wage went from \$4.20 an

hour for everyone from 16-19 years old in 1998 to \$9.50 in March 2005 for 18 & 19 year olds and \$7.60 for 16 and 17 year olds – an increase of 126% and 81% respectively. Youth unemployment during that time kept falling to 11.8% by December 2005 – a level not seen since 1987. The youth rate for 16 and 17 year olds was largely abolished in 2008.

During the Labour Government's term the adult minimum wage went from \$7 an hour to \$12 – an increase of 71%. The youth rate went from \$4.20 to \$12 – an increase of 186%. Yet when Labour lost the election the youth unemployment rate of 17.9% was still below the level when they were elected 9 years before.

Youth unemployment has increased since then along with the general levels of unemployment which are a consequence of an international recession that is a product of corporate greed not workers needs. The current youth unemployment rate of around 25% is a terrible blight on our community – but the same level was reached in the recession of the early 1990s when youth rates existed and the minimum wage for adults was much lower in real terms.

See the full article on [www.unite.org.nz](http://www.unite.org.nz)



# Anzac Day:

## Mutinies ended the First World War

*War is fundamental to the system. Anzac Day is a fitting time to look at the roots of war and ways to fight it. In the past century, over 30,000 New Zealand soldiers have been killed in battle, with more than half - 16,000 - being slaughtered in World War One alone. It is right and fitting that these soldiers should be mourned but Anzac Day is not the day for that - it is a celebration of war.*

Of course the politicians, bigwigs, media bosses, bishops and army brass who dominate the day must make many concessions to people's abhorrence of war, but fundamentally Anzac Day is about rallying popular support behind the New Zealand state and its organised means of violence - the armed forces.

We are trained from an early age to accept the state and the army.

If you asked New Zealanders in a poll tomorrow whether it was a good thing for Anzac Day to rally popular support behind the state and the army, the majority would probably agree.

But if you asked what 16,000 New Zealanders were killed for, very few people would be able to tell you, and of those who could, scarcely any would argue it was a good thing.

World War One was an insane bloodbath. The most famous Anzac engagement was a botched invasion of Turkey - the Gallipoli campaign. It has since been immortalised as the 'birth of the nation', where NZers showed their mettle by dying in their thousands because of a stuff-up by the British High Command (notably Winston Churchill, then Lord of the Admiralty).

After retreating from the Turkish disaster, the machine-gun murder continued in France. Army PR claims that 'troops quickly became accustomed to the rigours of trench warfare', before going on to record that in September 1916, just after arrival in France, 1560 soldiers were killed and 5440 wounded in just 23 days. The 'rigours of trench warfare' indeed.

The scale of the slaughter was tremendous, despite a stalemate across Europe - a stalemate that reflected the stale regimes that held the world in a corpse-like grip. It's often remarked that the war was a struggle between cousins (the English, German and

Russian kings were all first cousins). God, King, and Country were standard slogans on all sides - the only difference being which king and which country.

There was nothing to choose between one band of thieves and another and no end in sight to the slaughter.

The result was a contagion of mutinies, where troops called the bluff of their commanders and refused to fight. Mutinies ended the first world war.

Étaples, about 15 miles (24 km) south of Boulogne-sur-Mer, was a notorious base camp for those on their way to the front. Under atrocious conditions, both raw recruits and battle-weary veterans were subjected to intensive training. Conditions in the hospital were punitive rather than therapeutic.

Things came to a head on Sunday, September 9, 1917, after the arrest of Gunner A. J. Healy, a New Zealander, for desertion (he had been away without leave). A large crowd of angry men gathered and did not disperse even when told the gunner had been released. The arrival of military police only made matters worse and scuffles broke out. A military police officer fired into the crowd, killing Corporal W. B. Wood of the Gordon Highlanders and injuring a French woman.

Thereafter, the police simply fled. News of the shooting spread quickly. By 7.30 pm over a thousand angry men were pursuing the military police, who fled in the direction of the town. The Camp Adjutant describes how the men "swarmed into the town, raided the office of the Base Commandant, pulled him out of his chair and carried him on their shoulders through the town."

The following morning measures were taken to prevent further outbreaks and police pickets were

stationed on the bridges leading into the town. Nevertheless, by 4 pm men had broken through the pickets and were holding meetings in the town, followed by demonstrations around the camp.

On Tuesday, fearing further outbreaks, the Base Commandant requested reinforcements. Meanwhile, the demonstrations gathered momentum. On Wednesday, September 12, in spite of orders confining them to camp, over a thousand men broke out and marched through the town.

But later that day, reinforcements from the Honourable Artillery Company (HAC) arrived, armed with wooden staves. The HAC detachment was composed of officers, contained no working men and was supported by cavalry and machine-gunners. The threat worked: only 300 men broke camp and were arrested at Etaples.

Stacked up against the enormity of the war machine - the way thousands ran to their deaths - one mutiny may not seem much, but it was part of a wider trend. From 1914 to 1920, 1800 British servicemen were court-martialled for mutiny, while the French Army had between 25,000 overall to 40,000 in 1917 alone. Australian and NZ troops gained a reputation for "indiscipline" towards the end of the war.

On a much greater scale, in the Russian army soldiers' mutinies organised by radically democratic means and informed by coherent socialist propaganda, forced first the end of Tsarist dictatorship and secondly, sparked similar mutinies in the German navy and army, which led to the end of the war. The Etaples mutiny and others like it, for their part, made it impossible for the victorious western powers to 'strangle communism at birth' as the bloodthirsty Churchill put it.

Anzac Day is a chance to remember the dead - but not blindly - to remember also the criminal imperialism that sacrificed millions for greed.

By Andrew Tait

Below: War graves at Etaples, France



# 'Jewish lobby' an anti-semitic myth

**One of the most common explanations for the unwavering US support for Israel is the power of the "Israel lobby." But is this explanation really viable?**

Groups like AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) are undeniably powerful. In 1997, *Fortune* magazine named AIPAC the second most powerful lobby in America. Today, AIPAC claims to be a "a 100,000-member national grassroots movement", and its members pass resolutions and legislation supporting Israel's right to self-defence, in support of sanctions against Iran, and ensuring economic and military aid. There are also numerous other groups whose aim is to strengthen US-Israel relations.

However the argument that the US supports and funds Israel because of the pressure of the pro-Israel lobby does not see the full picture. Firstly, it opens the door to anti-Semitic arguments that it's "the Jews" to blame for the genocide against the Palestinians. But more importantly, it lets the US ruling class off the hook. Israel is vital to US interests in the Middle East, and that's why it receives so much support. The power of groups like AIPAC is a consequence of US backing of Israel, not the cause.

Israel is clearly the biggest recipient of US military and economic aid. Every year, the US gives around \$3 billion dollars in aid to Israel; this will continue under Obama, who recently approved \$30 billion in aid to Israel over the next decade. The next largest recipients of US aid are Egypt, Pakistan and Colombia. But you never hear of an Egypt, Pakistan or Colombia lobby, because there is no such thing. The US backs these states, just as it backs Israel, because it is in their strategic interests to do so.

The US still wants to dominate Latin America, and needs reliable allies like Colombia. And the Middle East is a strategically important area, a central oil-producing region and the cross roads of major trading routes. A 1945 US State Department analysis described Saudi Arabian oil as "that stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in history." Hence the endless jostling between world powers for control of the region.

This strategic importance of the Middle East is precisely why the US has always been a strong supporter of Israel. It was one of the first countries to recognise the newly created state in 1948, taking just two days to do so. This was at the time that America was starting to overtake Britain as the dominant superpower in the region after World War Two, so the US was keen to have friendly relations with the new state in the area.

Israel was also a new state which potentially could have turned to the USSR for support. A major part of imperialism is not just pure scrambling for resources, but competition with the other imperialist powers. With parts of the Middle East bordering on the USSR, it was even more important for the US to have bases and friendly regimes that could

undermine Russian influence in the region. This rivalry between the US and Russia was taking off around the time Israel was established, adding further incentive for the US to back Israel. The US wanted to prevent the USSR allying with the newly-formed state, and to use Israel to actively weaken Russian interests in other parts of the Middle East.

Every US president has recognised this importance, even Jimmy Carter, who is now portrayed as pro-Palestinian. At the first anniversary of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty and White House joint conference, in March 1980 he said "a strong Israel and a strong Egypt serve our own security interests." In February 1980 at the United Jewish Appeal National Young Leadership Conference he said "I am opposed to an independent Palestinian state, because ... this would be a destabilising factor in the Middle East and would certainly not serve the United States' interests." Even the AIPAC website states that "aid to Israel has long been a cornerstone of US foreign policy and a cost-effective way of serving America's national security interests in this critically important region."

Perhaps more explicit is Democratic Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson, who in 1973 said "the strength and Western orientation of Israel ...safeguards US access to oil... [it] serve[s] to inhibit and contain those irresponsible and radical elements in certain Arab states, who, were they free to do so, would pose a grave threat indeed to our principal source of petroleum in Persian gulf."

Israel is not the only state in the region to get major support from the US. Egypt and Saudi Arabia, for example, are both US allies and receive extensive military and economic aid. However there are several factors that make Israel unique. It is these factors, not the existence of the Israel lobby, that explain why the US backs it more strongly than its other allies in the Middle East.

Israel provides a much more stable ally than other Arab states. Being a colonial settler state, its citizens are for the most part bound up in the whole project of Israel. They generally support Israel's policies towards the Palestinians, and many materially benefit from Israel's plunder of Palestinian water, land and crops. Israeli houses and settlements are surrounded by lush, green sculptured gardens, while Palestinian towns often have raw sewage running through their streets and live on less than 100 litres of water per person a day. This is not to say that there are no class divisions or class tensions in Israel, and no opposition to the treatment of Palestinians, but it is markedly muted compared to surrounding nations.

The Arab states on the other hand, face mass opposition at home. A large Palestinian diaspora throughout the region plus popular sympathy for their plight make these nations unstable. Class divisions are also stark, with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan being run by dictatorships. Many working class Arabs oppose ties with the US and with Israel, as well as the repressive domestic policy of these dictatorships. In 2007, a massive strike wave swept through the textile factories of Mahala in Egypt and threatened the Mubarak regime. There were also massive protests in Egypt during the

bombing of Gaza a year ago, calling on Mubarak to open the Rafah Crossing and allow refugees flee the Gaza Strip to Egypt.

There can also be a pressure for the Arab states to bow to this popular pressure and lead nationalist movements against the US. The US has learnt this the hard way. In 1953, the Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh attempted to nationalise the oil industry, leading the CIA to back a coup to install the pro-US Shah Mohammad Reza. However he was later overthrown by a working class revolt in 1979. Then in Egypt in 1952, Iraq in 1958 and Yemen in 1962 Arab nationalists overthrew Western-backed leaders. It was around this time that Israel became the premier watchdog state in the region. Up until this point, Israel was just one of many US allies in the Middle East. The rise of these Arab national movements led the US to throw its full weight behind Israel, recognising the importance of a more stable and reliable ally.

An article in Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* from the time of the Mossadegh overthrow sums up Israel's new role: "Strengthening Israel helps the Western powers maintain equilibrium and stability in the Middle East. Israel is to become the watchdog.... If for any reason the Western powers should sometimes prefer to close their eyes, Israel could be relied upon to punish one or several neighbouring states whose discourtesy to the West went beyond the bounds of the permissible."

Proponents of the Israel Lobby argument point to sometimes divergent interests or actions of the US and Israel – for example, Israel being too aggressive in relation to neighbouring Arab states that the US may be trying to negotiate with.

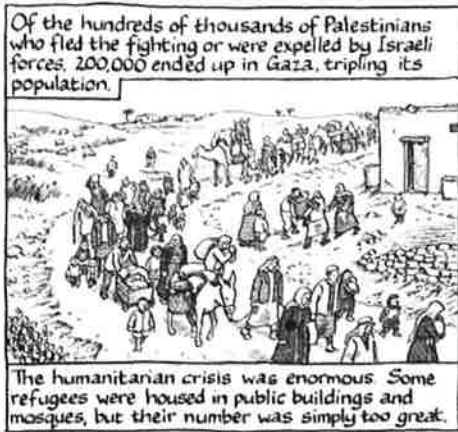
This argument still ignores the role that Israel plays. As an attack dog, it is possible for Israel to break off its leash and go further than the US would like. And this isn't necessarily a bad thing for America – in fact, they have long used Israel to do their dirty work in the region. They often use funding to Israel to get around sanctions and trade embargos. For example, in 1978, Israel sold US jets and helicopters to Indonesia, while Indonesia was under the Suharto dictatorship and committing genocide against the East Timorese.

They can use Israel to attack their enemies, while being seen to be the brokers of peace and looking as if they are trying to rein in Israeli excesses. For example, when Israel invaded Lebanon in 2006, it was a useful distraction from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was also part of the broader 'War on Terror' and US targeting of Islamist groups like Hezbollah. However it was Israel who provided the military personnel and weaponry, and whose reputation was tarnished, not the US.

This is why US presidents can make vague criticisms of Israel, while continuing military aid. Obama may have made some minor noises about the illegal settlements, yet he has actually increased aid. He has blocked every UN attempt to hold Israel accountable for war crimes committed during the war on Gaza. Just like every US president before him, he is continuing to look after vital US interests in the Middle East.

Frances Lewis

# Footnotes to a forgotten war



**There is no one else who does quite what Joe Sacco does. Part artist and part investigative reporter, he has spent the past 20 years traveling to some of the world's most broken and abandoned places, producing extraordinary works of war reportage in comic book form. Laura Durkay of Socialist Worker (US) reviews his latest graphic novel, which tells the story of the forgotten 1956 massacres in the towns of Rafah and Khan Younis.**

Sacco's meticulously detailed black-and-white comic books combine a keen ability to tease out complex history with genuine compassion for the stories of ordinary people living their lives in a war zone, often with no hope of escape.

Sacco developed his unique blend of journalism and cartooning with the serialized comic Palestine, documenting life in the Occupied Territories in the early 1990s, and honed his craft through a series of comics about the Bosnian war, most notably, the superb book-length Safe Area Gorazde.

In retrospect, they look like studies for Footnotes in Gaza, an artistic and journalistic tour de force that explores two almost-forgotten massacres in the towns of Rafah and Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip.

If nothing else, Footnotes in Gaza should be respected as a triumph of investigative reporting. Digging away at what he calls "footnotes to a sideshow of a forgotten war," Sacco brings to light the long-buried story of the massacre of 386 unarmed Palestinians by Israeli troops during the 1956 Suez Crisis - 275 in Khan Younis and 111 in Rafah - the largest mass execution of Palestinians on Palestinian soil in history.

Under the pretext of searching for guerrilla

fighters who had been conducting raids along Israel's borders, the Israeli army shot hundreds of Palestinian men of military age during its brief occupation of the Gaza Strip in November 1956.

In Khan Younis, many people were killed in their homes or lined up against the wall of a 14th century castle in the town's center and executed. In Rafah, there was a more drawn-out process in which the male population of the refugee camp was rounded up inside the grounds of a school and "screened" to identify suspected fighters. Most were released after enduring hours of detention and terror, some were arrested and taken to prisons inside Israel, and others, mostly randomly, were killed.

Sacco interviewed dozens of Palestinian and Israeli witnesses and survivors, piecing together incomplete and sometimes conflicting eyewitness accounts into a coherent narrative of the chilling events. By illustrating these memories throughout the book, he takes us back into the past with stunning immediacy and directness.

Sacco has developed a sophisticated visual language of perspective, angle and framing, which he uses unapologetically to create sympathy for the Palestinian victims of the massacre.

The Israeli soldiers doing the killing are often literally faceless, their expressions hidden behind hats and helmets. In the few cases where we do clearly see an Israeli soldier's face, he's often distinguished by an act of compassion, such as one man who refuses to shoot a teenage boy.

In a trick also employed by the makers of the film The Battle of Algiers, Sacco often positions the viewer behind lines of Israeli troops, so their backs are toward us. Palestinians, on the other hand, face our gaze head-on. We see their faces, their fear and their humanity, and we're unable to look away.

Sacco has used flashbacks in previous comics to illustrate the stories of his interview subjects, but never has his control over the line between the present and the past been so masterful. The constant visual shuttling between 1956 and today - sometimes both are contained in the same panel - reinforces how present the past is in Palestine, and how the trauma of past violence lingers in individuals and communities long after the dead are buried.

"Palestinians never seem to have the luxury of digesting one tragedy before the next is upon them," Sacco writes in the book's introduction. One of his reoccurring frustrations while doing research is the tendency of older interviewees to mix up details from '48, '56, '67 and later. The injustices of the past are continually being ground up, mashed together and bulldozed over by fresh horrors.

Sacco visited Rafah during the peak of Israel's campaign of house demolitions along the border with Egypt, and was in Gaza when American peace activist Rachel Corrie was killed, crushed by an Israeli bulldozer as she tried to defend a Palestinian home from demolition. These events are documented in the book as well, reinforcing the idea that little has changed in 50 years.

Yet even this recent history is now dated. The six and a half years Sacco spent writing and drawing Footnotes have included Israel's withdrawal of settlements and ground troops from Gaza, Hamas' victory in the 2006 Palestinian elections, the

crippling siege on Gaza and last winter's Operation Cast Lead.

"Events are continuous, one after another," an old man tells Sacco, explaining why he has difficulty recalling the events of '56. And indeed, the cumulative effect of the book is of layer after layer of trauma being heaped on generation after generation of a besieged population with little hope in sight.

Many of the younger Palestinians he talks to don't understand his fascination with '56. "Every day here is '56!" snaps one man, after showing Sacco the bullet holes left by Israeli snipers in the wall of his home.

For Sacco, the importance of these fairly obscure events in 1956 is twofold. On the most basic level, a piece of history - perhaps incidental in the "grand narrative," but unforgettable to the people who lived it - has been preserved. This particular footnote has not been dropped from history.

On a deeper level, Sacco sees this history as providing vital context to events taking place in Palestine today. Sacco believes that context is essential, and precisely what's lacking in most mainstream journalism.

Footnotes in Gaza includes a fairly lengthy section depicting the Nakba - the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from the territory that is now Israel - and the years between 1948 and 1956, when Palestinian refugees lived in tents without clean water or adequate food, while their homes and fertile fields lay just over the border in what was now Israel. As Sacco says: "It's essential to tell that. I wasn't going to drop the reader on November 3, 1956, and expect the reader to understand what was going on. Okay, you're going to see people getting killed, but what does it all mean? Why did it happen, or what was the context? Maybe the "why" can never really be answered on some level, but what was the context? Most of it took place in refugee camps. So, well, why are there Palestinian refugees? The reader needs to know that."

The massacres, and the grief and anger they generated, are a piece of Gaza's history to this day. In 2001, Sacco interviewed senior Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi, who was 9 years old in 1956 and vividly remembered the death of his uncle in the massacre.

"I couldn't sleep for many months after that," Rantisi said. "It left a wound in my heart that can never heal. This sort of action can never be forgotten... [T]hey planted hatred in our hearts."

Sacco refutes charges of bias: "What's important to me is to tell the Palestinian viewpoint because it's not told well. Maybe we see Palestinian talking heads on TV. But what about the people on the street? What are they feeling? And its then you see their humor; you see their humanity; you see them being angry and you begin to understand why. And I think that sort of journalism does a service. That's what I'm trying to get across. I don't really think of it as biased, I think of it as being honest."

Joe Sacco, Footnotes in Gaza: A Graphic Novel [4]. Metropolitan Books, 2009, 432 pages, \$29.95

# All eyes on Nepal:

## Four reasons Nepal's revolution matters

Something remarkable is happening. A whole generation of people has never seen a radical, secular, revolutionary movement rise with popular support. And yet here it is – in Nepal today.

By Mike Ely for Left Views.



**This movement has overthrown Nepal's hated King Gyanendra and abolished the medieval monarchy.**

It has created a revolutionary army that now squares off with the old King's army. It has built parallel political power in remote rural areas over a decade of guerrilla war – undermining feudal traditions like the caste system. It has gathered broad popular support and emerged as the leading force of an unprecedented Constituent Assembly (CA). And it has done all this under the radical banner of Maoist communism – advocating a fresh attempt at socialism and a classless society around the world.

People in Nepal call these revolutionaries the Maobadi.

Another remarkable thing is the silence surrounding all this. There has been very little reporting about the intense moments now unfolding in Nepal, or about the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) that stand at their center. Meanwhile, the nearby Tibetan uprisings against abuses by China's government got non-stop coverage.

There are obvious reasons for this silence. The Western media isn't thrilled when people in one of the world's poorest countries throw their support behind one of the world's most radical movements.

But clearly many alternative news sources don't quite know what to make of the Nepali revolution. The Maobadi's mix of communist goals and non-

dogmatic methods disturb a lot of leftist assumptions too. When the CPN(Maoist) launched an armed uprising in 1996, some people thought these were outdated tactics. When the CPN(Maoist) suspended armed combat in 2006 and entered an anti-monarchist coalition government, some people assumed they would lose their identity to a corrupt cabal. When the Maoists press their current anti-feudal program, some people think they are forgetting about socialism.

But silent skepticism is a wrong approach. The world needs to be watching Nepal. The stunning Maoist victory in the April [2008] elections was not, yet, the decisive victory over conservative forces. The Maobadi are at the center of the political stage but they have not yet defeated or dismantled the old government's army. New tests of strength lie ahead.

The Maoists of Nepal aren't just a opposition movement any more – they are tackling the very different problems of leading a society through a process of radical change. They are maneuvering hard to avoid a sudden crushing defeat at the hands of powerful armies. As a result, the Maobadi of Nepal are carrying out tactics for isolating their internal rivals, broadening their appeal, and neutralizing external enemies.

All this looks bewildering seen up close. This world has been through a long, heartless stretch without much radicalism or revolution. Most people have never seen what it looks like when a popular communist revolution reaches for power.

Let's break the silence by listing four reasons for looking closely at Nepal.

**Reason #1: Here are communists who have discarded rigid thinking, but not their radicalism.**

Leaders of the CPN(Maoist) say they protect the living revolution "from the revolutionary phrases we used to memorize."

The Maobadi took a fresh and painstakingly detailed look at their society. They identified which conditions and forces imposed the horrific poverty on the people. They developed creative methods for connecting deeply with the discontent and highest hopes of people. They have generated great and growing influence over the last fifteen years.

To get to the brink of power, this movement fused and alternated different forms of struggle. They started with a great organizing drive, followed by launching a guerrilla war in 1996, and then entering negotiations in 2006. They created new revolutionary governments in remote base areas over ten years, and followed up with a political offensive to win over new urban support. They have won victory in the special election in April, and challenged their foot-dragging opponents by threatening to launch mass mobilizations in the period ahead. They reached out broadly, without abandoning their armed forces or their independent course.

The Maobadi say they have the courage "to climb the unexplored mountain." They insist that communism needs to be reconceived. They believe popular accountability may prevent the emergence of arrogant new elites. They reject the one-party state and call for a socialist process with multi-party

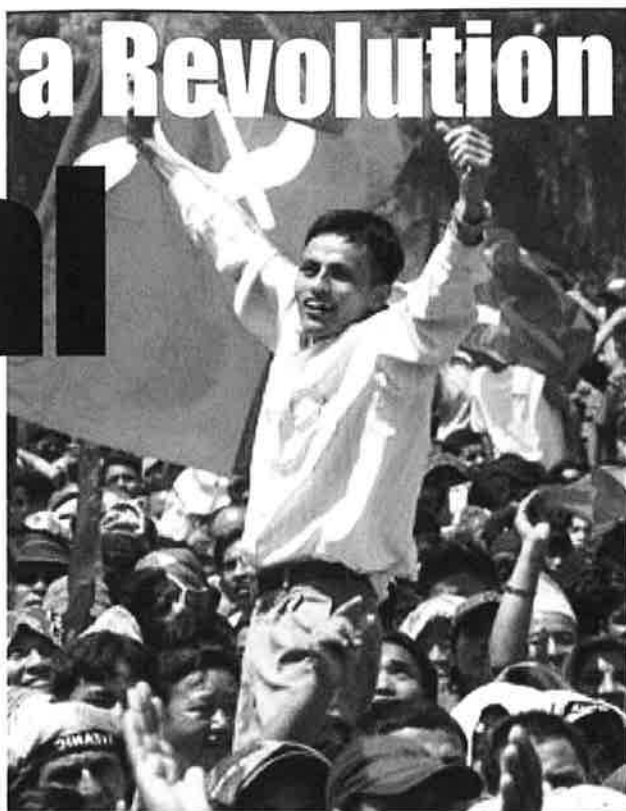


# Eyewitness to a Revolution in Nepal

When a peoples' movement overthrew Nepal's hated King Gyanendra and the oppressive monarchical structure in 2006, not much was heard about it in NZ.

Yet exciting things are happening in Nepal today that deserve our attention. The Nepalese people are striving to build a new and better society.

We now have a chance to find out more. Ben Peterson is a young Australian activist who spent a year in Nepal witnessing first hand the revolutionary struggle. He will be in NZ from 21-26 March 2010.



## NZ speaking tour by Ben Peterson

**Ben:** "In 2006, a Peoples' Movement overthrew Nepal's ruling monarchy. They're fighting to build a new Nepal free of poverty, oppression and discrimination by sex, caste or race.

When I was in Nepal I met amazing people, peasant farmers, workers, students, youth, and the elderly, all fighting for a democratic future. Everywhere I went there was a common desire for something better.

Leading the struggle is the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), who built on support earned during the Peoples' War (1996-2006) to win a majority of votes in democratic elections, enabling them to form a revolutionary government. That government was undermined by forces hostile to the Peoples' Movement.

Today, the struggle continues at all levels of Nepalese society. It's not over, but the people of Nepal are experiencing more control over their lands and communities. And if this 21st century revolution continues it will impact on the lives of many more."

**To help support and promote Ben's tour contact these people:**

**Auckland** - Daphna Whitmore, [wpmz@clear.net.nz](mailto:wpmz@clear.net.nz).

**Hamilton** - Jared Philips, [jared@unite.org.nz](mailto:jared@unite.org.nz), 029-4949 863.

**Rotorua** - Bernie Hornfeck, [bernieh@clear.net.nz](mailto:bernieh@clear.net.nz), (07)345 9853.

**Wellington** - Alastair Reith, [alastair.reith@gmail.com](mailto:alastair.reith@gmail.com), 027-711 9591.

**Christchurch** - Phil Ferguson, [phil.ferguson@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:phil.ferguson@canterbury.ac.nz), 021-443 948.

**Dunedin** - Andrew Tait, [andrewmtait@hotmail.com](mailto:andrewmtait@hotmail.com), 027-606 9549.

**National co-ordination/publicity** - Vaughan Gunson, [svpl@xtra.co.nz](mailto:svpl@xtra.co.nz), 021-0415 082.

### TOUR ITINERARY (draft):

**Sunday 21 March - Auckland**

**Monday 22 March - Auckland**

**Tuesday 23 March - Hamilton/Rotorua**

**Wednesday 24 March - Wellington**

**Thursday 25 March - Dunedin**

**Friday 26 March - Christchurch**

\*Meeting times and venues to be confirmed.



elections. They question whether a standing army will serve a new Nepal well, and advocate a system of popular militias. And they want to avoid concentrating their hopes in one or two leaders-for-life, but instead will empower a rising new generation of revolutionary successors.

Nepal is in that bottom tier of countries called the "fourth world" – most people there suffer in utter poverty. It is a world away from the developed West, and naturally the political solutions of the Nepali Maoists' may not apply directly to countries like the U.S. or Britain. But can't we learn from the freshness they bring to this changing world?

Will their reconception of communism succeed? It is still impossible to know. But their attempt itself already has much to teach.

## **Reason #2: Imagine Nepal as a Fuse Igniting India**

Nepal is such a marginalized backwater that it is hard to imagine its politics having impact outside its own borders. The country is poor, landlocked, remote and only the size of Arkansas. Its 30 million people live pressed between the world's most populous giants, China and India.

But then consider what Nepal's revolution might mean for a billion people in nearby India.

A new Nepal would have a long open border with some of India's most impoverished areas. Maoist armed struggle has smoldered in those northern Indian states for decades – with roots among Indian dirt farmers. Conservative analysts sometimes speak of a "red corridor" of Maoist-Naxalite guerrilla zones running through central India, north to south, from the Nepali border toward the southern tip.

Understanding the possibilities, Nepal's Maobadi made a bold proposal: that the revolutionary movements across South Asia should consider merging their countries after overthrowing their governments and creating a common regional federation. The Maobadi helped form the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA) in 2001, which brought together ten different revolutionary groupings from throughout the region.

A future revolutionary government in Nepal will

have a hard time surviving alongside a hostile India. It could face demands, crippling embargos and perhaps even invasion. But at the very same time, such a revolution could serve as an inspiration and a base area for revolution in that whole region. It could impact the world.

## **Reason #3: Nepal shows that a new, radically better world is possible.**

Marx once remarked that the revolution burrows unseen underground and then bursts into view to cheers of "Well dug, old mole!"

We have all been told that radical social change is impossible. Rebellion against this dominant world order has often seemed marked by backward-looking politics, xenophobia, lowered sights and Jihadism. And yet, here comes that old mole popping up in Nepal – offering a startling glimpse of how people can transform themselves and their world.

Some of the world's poorest and most oppressed people have set out in the Nepali highlands to remake everything around them – through armed struggle, political power, and collective labor. Farming people, who are often half-starved and illiterate have formed peoples courts and early agricultural communes. Wife beating and child marriage are being challenged. Young men and women have joined the revolutionary army to defeat their oppressors. There is defiance of arranged marriage and a blossoming of "love matches," even between people of different castes. There is a rejection of religious bigotry and the traditions of a Hindu monarchy. The 40 ethnic groups of Nepal are negotiating new relations based on equality and a sharing of political power.

All this is like a wonderful scent upon the wind. You are afraid to turn away, unless it might suddenly disappear.

## **Reason #4: When people dare to make revolution – they must not stand alone.**

These changes would have been unthinkable, if the CPN (Maoist) had not dared to launch a revolutionary war in 1996. And their political plan became reality because growing numbers of people dared to throw their lives into the effort. It is hard to

exaggerate the hope and courage that has gripped people.

Events may ultimately roll against those hopes. This revolution in Nepal may yet be crushed or even betrayed from within. Such dangers are inherent and inevitable in living revolutions.

If the Maobadi pursue new leaps in their revolutionary process, they will likely face continuing attacks from India, backed by the U.S. The CPN (Maoist) has long been (falsely!) labeled "terrorists" by the U.S. government. They are portrayed as village bullies and exploiters of child-soldiers by some human rights organizations. Western powers have armed Nepal's pro-royal National army with modern weapons. A conservative mass movement in Nepal's fertile Terai agricultural area has been encouraged by India and Hindu fundamentalists.

Someone needs to spread the word of what is actually going on. It would be intolerable if U.S.-backed destabilization and suppression went unopposed in the U.S. itself.

Here it is: A little-known revolution in Nepal. Who will we tell about it? What will we learn from it? What will we do about it?

**LeftViews is Socialist Voice's forum for articles related to rebuilding the left in Canada and around the world, reflecting a wide variety of socialist opinion.**

**This article was first published as "All Eyes on Maobadi" in June 2008, on Kasama, a website that has featured extensive discussions of the Nepalese struggle, primarily from Maoist perspectives. Mike Ely also manages the website Revolution in South Asia.**

**For more on the Nepalese revolution, see:**

- **Analytical Monthly Review: "Nepal's Revolution: Armed Struggle Made Free and Fair Elections Possible"** 4

- **Interview with UCPN (Maoist)'s Baburam Bhattarai and other coverage in Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal** 6.

- **Gary Leupp: "The Andolan in Kathmandu and the Revolution to Follow."**

## **Military chief, Congress Party try to turn tide**

The movement in Nepal for the restoration of civilian supremacy continued in December, with 100,000 people demonstrating in Kathmandu on December 22 on the final day of a three-day general strike called by the Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M). The general strike is part of a campaign against the conservative Congress Party and the Nepali military. It is an attempt to repeat the success of the general strike that overthrew the centuries-old feudal monarchy and swept the Communist Party, which launched a civil war against the monarchy in 1996, to power. For more than ten years the Communists have fought a guerrilla war against the Royal Nepalese Army, and the monarchy and landlords that it protected.

The scale of the Maoist's victory was a blow to the US's policy in the region. Both the US and Britain helped arm the Royal Nepalese Army and the US state department has described the CPN-M as a "terrorist organisation". The Communists, with by far the largest electoral support, became the leading party in a coalition government but in May last year, when the government sacked the head of the military, it was unconstitutionally overruled by President Ram Baran Yadav, of Congress. His decision makes it clear the Nepali ruling class is hoping the military will defend it against the popular movement led by the Communists. To advance the struggle for a "New Nepal", in late 2009 the Maoists declared the creation of a series of "autonomous" states across Nepal, largely based on oppressed nationalities or other minority groups. In December, 18 different autonomous states were declared across Nepal at mass rallies. In some areas, new democratic local structures have been created to provide grassroots community governance. The Maoist-led movement is gathering strength, but it is facing threats from a ruling elite determined to hold on to power.

### **Violent reaction**

Police are increasingly attacking Maoist activists. Landless farmers who have occupied the land of wealthy landlords, or fallow land not being used by the state, have come under attack, with several farmers and activists murdered by death squads. There have been calls from within the Nepali elite for a military strongman like Augusto Pinochet, who butchered thousands of socialists and trade unionists in Chile in 1973. Conflict is likely to continue and deepen in Nepal. The January 5 Himalayan Times reported Communist leader Prachanda had explained his party's approach to the coming period: "At present, our party's line is to make preparations for a decisive revolt by using the fronts of the street, parliament and the government." The conflict between the Maoist-led mass movement and elite reflects the fundamental contradictions in the political situation: the conflict between the democratic aspirations of the people and the power of the state in the hands of the elites. A kind of dual power is beginning to emerge, with the police and military in the hands of the old power, and new emerging structures based on the oppressed developing through the declarations of autonomous states and the constitution-writing process.

Ben Peterson for Green Left Weekly, adapted for Socialist Review

## Control is aim of US aid

***There are now at least 250 open air camps in Haiti, where hundreds of thousands of people find shelter in cardboard boxes, and where residents are reduced to sucking on salt to keep away the hunger pains.***

But the US is not only keeping aid from getting in, it is preventing desperate people from getting out. Writing in the *American Socialist Worker*, Rachel Cohen and Alan Maass describe a "ring of mighty warships" that surrounds Port-au-Prince. Their purpose is not to provide aid, but to intercept refugees:

"To underline the point, a US Air Force transport plane spends hours in the air above Haiti...broadcasting a radio statement in Creole from Haiti's ambassador to the US, Raymond Joseph... 'If you think you will reach the US and all the doors will be wide open to you, that's not at all the case. And they will intercept you right on the water, and send you back home where you came from.'"

The US government claims that the military presence is needed because of "security concerns". Riots, lawlessness and violence are spreading. Without the military presence, they say, all attempts to provide aid would prove futile.

Racist lies. This is the standard line that has been used to send shivers down backs ever since the liberation of the territory in 1804: "There's blacks down there – and ain't no-one controlling them!" The reality is – as you would expect in a situation where people need to band together to survive – much different.

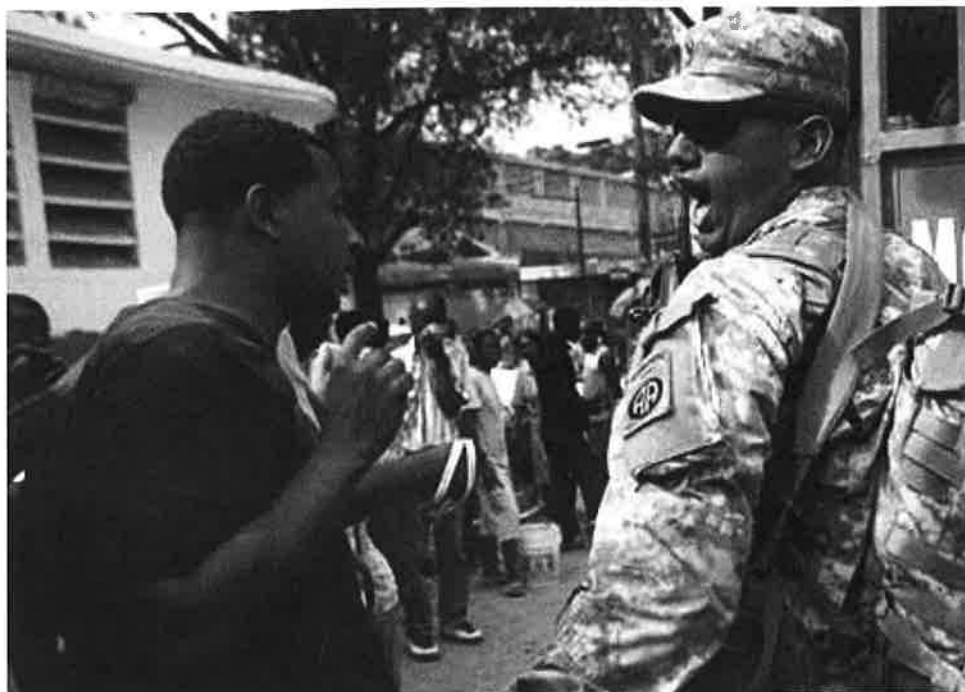
Evan Lyon, a doctor with Partners in Health described in an interview with CommonDreams.org how, in the area where he operates, "There's no UN guards. There's no US military presence. There's no Haitian police presence. And there's also no violence. There is no insecurity."

Christian Science Monitor has reported how, immediately after the earthquake struck, makeshift camps for the homeless were constructed spontaneously. As the rich left the city, the poor organised themselves. At one such camp, Primatur Gardens,

"a self-appointed organising committee has completed a census of the camp...and created a crude camp ID card. Volunteers have been rounded up to perform everything from the menial – litter clean-up – to the specialised, like the nurse and medical student manning the camp's makeshift clinic. When petty theft became a problem, a citizens' patrol was set up and a 10pm curfew was set."

One participant in the camp related their mood: "This is state property and we respected it... But once there was a disaster and the government vanished, it became the right of the people to occupy this property and use it."

Report after report from people actually on the ground in Haiti have said the very same thing. No security issues. Period.



**82nd airborne: Among the thousands-strong US occupation force arriving in Haiti is the 82nd airborne division – known in Iraq as "the murdering maniacs" for torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners, including those held at Abu Ghraib.**

### US imperial designs

The real reasons for the US giving priority to its military forces relates to its imperial interests in the region. George W. Bush, whose government backed the coup against leftist President Aristide in 2004, has been put in charge of fund-raising for Haiti by President Obama.

Bush reportedly warned of "shysters" who "show up and take advantage of people's good will". This is a very accurate description of the US with regard to the situation in Haiti. But Bush went on, stressing a focus not simply on aid, but "a strategic perspective, because it makes sense to have a stable democracy in our neighbourhood".

Establishment think-tank the Heritage Foundation was pushing the same line: "The U.S. response to the tragic earthquake in Haiti earthquake offers opportunities to re-shape Haiti's...government and economy as well as to improve the public image of the United States in the region."

The US ruling class has traditionally seen Latin America as their "backyard". Yet over the past twelve years, the election of governments hostile to US domination of the region has undermined US influence. In particular, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has been attempting to form a regional trading block with the power to thwart US economic domination of its smaller trading partners. While the project has been only moderately successful, the anti-US rhetoric of leaders such as Chavez and President Evo Morales of Bolivia have provided a beacon for radicalising

sections of the continent.

Combined with their social and economic programs which benefit the poor, their example is one that the US ruling class is loath to see replicated. In 2008, after Ecuador announced its intention to evict the US military from Manta air base, the US re-established the Fourth Fleet. Set up during World War II and afterwards disbanded, the fleet was designed to reinforce US naval supremacy in the Caribbean. With a number of free trade agreements thwarted, and several governments seeking to

increase ties with China, US gunboat diplomacy is the order of the day. The US has also bolstered its land-based military presence in South America, last year signing a 10-year agreement with Colombia (which shares a border with Venezuela) for the use of seven military bases with the country.

Haiti fits into this broad strategic agenda. Haiti lies in the middle of waters that flow directly onto the beaches of US ally Colombia and foes Cuba

and Venezuela. Haiti is so important to US plans the fifth-largest US embassy in the world was constructed there after the 2004 coup against Aristide. The pattern is the same wherever the US tries to settle accounts. From Iraq and Afghanistan to Haiti, public pronouncements of benevolence and humanity have been followed by the negation of all things decent. And bodies left crushed under the dead weight of imperialism.

By Ben Hillier

***"The U.S. response to the tragic earthquake in Haiti earthquake offers opportunities to re-shape Haiti government and economy as well as to improve the public image of the United States in the region."***

# Born from struggle against slavery



**Left:** Tens of millions of Africans were forced into slavery in the Americas. And while Haiti is ecologically and economically devastated now, in the 18th century, its massive plantations produced commodities valued at two-thirds of the gross national product of France.

**The recent destruction in Haiti, and the disgraceful US response, adds salt to the wounds of a nation founded on the greatest slave rebellion in history.**

From 1791-1804 a revolutionary movement of African slaves in then French-controlled Saint Domingue led to the birth of Haiti, the second independent republic in the Americas and the first "black republic" in the world. It was the biggest slave revolt in human history – and there is no better account of this than *The Black Jacobins*.

Between 1500 and 1800, some 30 million slaves were taken from Africa by force by British slavers to work the plantations of the West Indies and North America. Sold to French colonists at Saint Domingue and other Caribbean colonies, slaves were forced to work the sugar, coffee, cotton, indigo and tobacco plantations, producing exports commodities valued at two-thirds of the gross national product of France.

Conditions for slaves in Saint Domingue were lethal – sadistic masters forced slaves into cruel submission. In *The Black Jacobins*, author CLR James writes:

"There was no ingenuity that fear or a depraved imagination could devise which was not employed to break the slaves spirit...irons on the hands and feet, blocks of wood that the slaves had to drag around with them wherever they went, the tin-plate mask designed to prevent the slaves from eating the sugar-cane, the iron collar. Whipping was interrupted in order to put salt, pepper, citron, cinders, aloes and hot ashes on the bleeding wounds. Mutilations were common, limbs, ears and sometimes the private parts to deprive them... Their masters poured burning wax on their arms and hands and shoulders, emptied boiling sugar cane over their heads, burned them alive, roasted them on slow fires, filled them with gunpowder and blew them up with a match..."

But resistance continued – slaves poisoned their masters' drinking wells, burnt the valuable crops, or escaped to form 'maroon' colonies in the mountains

rising above the towns. But when the French revolution broke out in 1789, the masses of Saint Domingue gathered the confidence to confront the whole colonial system head-on.

A revolt broke out across the island in 1791. The meticulous planning of the struggle had grown out of the forced organisation of the slave workers in the huge plantation industry, where gangs of hundreds of slaves worked and lived side by side. For this co-ordinated attempt at liberation, a plan was conceived: the slaves in the suburbs and outskirts of the capital, Le Cap, would set fire to the plantations as a diversion for the colonialists – and a signal to the slaves in the town. Town-dwelling domestic slaves would then quickly massacre the whites and secure the town.

That such a plan – involving thousands of conspirators – could even be considered is a testimony to the immense solidarity that existed amongst the slaves. That it succeeded the without the slave-owners getting forewarning is proof of the horror of the system.

The military leader of the Haitian revolution was Toussaint L'Ouverture, a self-educated former domestic slave. After the British had invaded Saint-Domingue, he decided to fight for the French if they would agree to free all the slaves, which was done on 29 August, 1793. L'Ouverture worked with a French general to ensure all slaves would be freed. He brought his forces over to the French side in May 1794 and began to fight for the French Republic. Many enslaved Africans were attracted to Toussaint's forces. He insisted on discipline and restricted wholesale slaughter. Under his leadership, the forces made up mostly of former slaves defeated English and Spanish armies but Toussaint did not wish to surrender too much power to France. He defeated a British expeditionary force in 1798, and even led an invasion of neighbouring Santo Domingo, freeing the slaves there by 1801. But Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802 dispatched a large

expeditionary force of French soldiers and warships to the island, led by Bonaparte's brother-in-law Charles Leclerc, to restore French rule, and under secret instructions to later restore slavery. L'Ouverture was asked to integrate his remaining troops into the French Army and was promised he would not be arrested. L'Ouverture agreed to this but was deceived, seized, and shipped off to France. He died months later while imprisoned at Fort-de-Joux in the Jura region.

But Napoleon was unable to quash the slaves desire for freedom and Haiti was declared independent in 1804. The revolution shook slavery to its core. This process was finished off later when the slaves of Jamaica overthrew British slavery in 1831, and southern slaves in America joined white people in America's North to fight a civil war that abolished American slavery two decades later. Slavery ended because of the actions of slaves themselves – and Haiti has a special place in this history.

*The Black Jacobins* is an exhilarating account, and a must-read for anyone who is angered by barbarism that modern-day imperialism dishes out in Haiti, or in the numerous war-torn or impoverished regions of the world.

Yet despite over two centuries of Haitian independence, imperialist powers have continued to meddle in its affairs. World powers refused to recognise its independence, and eventually in 1825 France forced the country – through isolation – to agree to pay gargantuan compensation to plantation owners for loss of land. France exacted over 120 years of revenge, in the

form of a \$21 billion debt (indexed to current value) for the crime of people liberating themselves.

The debt was funded by loans from a French bank. This unjust agreement created a cycle of debt that would impoverish Haiti until repayments ended in 1947. In addition, the US occupied Haiti for 20 years from 1915, and then later propped up a brutal dictatorship that lasted until 1990.

The US, and its agent the UN, continue to dominate Haiti today, and has stepped this up further to take advantage of recent catastrophe. So when we read of the need to maintain supposed "stability" and "order" in Haiti today, we must ask ourselves – whose stability? It was the stability of imperialism, with its profiteering, racism and oppression, that the Haitian revolution so rightfully smashed.

Paul Coats

# Military takeover has no legal basis

**The theft of Haiti has been swift and crude.**

**By John Pilger**

On 22 January the US secured "formal approval" from the United Nations to take over all air and sea ports in Haiti, and to "secure" roads. No Haitian signed the agreement, which has no basis in law. Power rules in a US naval blockade and the arrival of 13,000 marines, special forces, spooks and mercenaries, none with humanitarian relief training.

The airport in the capital, Port-au-Prince, is now a US military base and relief flights have been re-routed to the Dominican Republic. All flights stopped for three hours for the arrival of Hillary Clinton. Critically injured Haitians waited unaided as 800 US residents in Haiti were fed, watered and evacuated. Six days passed before the US air force

dropped bottled water to people ravaged by thirst and dehydration.

The first TV reports played a critical role, giving the impression of widespread criminal mayhem. Matt Frei, the BBC reporter dispatched from Washington, seemed on the point of hyperventilation as he warned about the need for "security". In spite of the demonstrable dignity of the earthquake victims, and evidence of citizens' groups toiling unaided to rescue people, and even a US general's assessment that the violence in Haiti was considerably less than before the earthquake, Frei brayed that "looting is the only industry" and "the dignity of Haiti's past is long forgotten".

It was yet another master class in consigning a history of unerring US violence and exploitation in Haiti to the victims. "There's no doubt", reported Frei in the aftermath of the bloody US invasion of

Iraq in 2003, "that the desire to bring good, to bring American values to the rest of the world, and especially now to the Middle East...is now increasingly tied up with military power."

In a sense, he is right. Never before in so-called peacetime have human relations been as militarised by rapacious power. Never before has a US president subordinated his government to the military establishment, including the secretary of defence, of his discredited predecessor, as Barack Obama has done. In pursuing George W Bush's policy of war and domination, Obama seeks from congress an unprecedented military budget in excess of \$700 billion. He has become, in effect, the spokesman for a military coup.

**Read the original at [newstatesman.com](http://newstatesman.com)**

## Israel: The Hijack State \$6

**John Rose**

Israel's "fight against terrorism" has been presented as a heroic struggle by a previously persecuted people against evil-eyed assassins and fanatics hellbent on murderous destruction of the Israeli state. However, the history of Israel suggests the opposite interpretation. The state of Israel was founded upon the expulsion of three-quarters of a million Palestinians from their homes. Israel's evolution has seen the increasing use of state terror on a monumental scale. This, combined with American backing for a militarization of its economy, has turned Israel into a ruthless outpost for Western domination of the middle east.



## Capitalism's New Crisis \$5

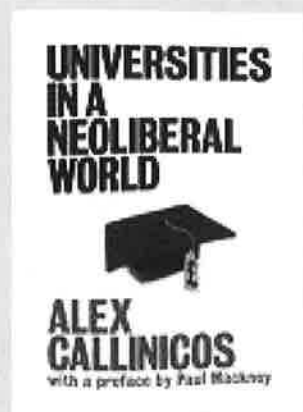
**Chris Harman**

We are witnessing the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression. Three decades of free market ideology are being torn up as governments step in to bail out their large banks. But is all this the result of the greed of the wall street bankers? Chris Harman shows how the roots of the crisis lie in a wider crisis of profitability across the whole of capitalism.

## Venezuela and Revolution in the 21st century \$3

**Joseph Choonara**

Latin America is in the frontline of resistance to neo-liberalism, and Venezuela is at the heart of that rebellion. Hugo Chavez's call for 'Socialism in the 21st century' has inspired millions around the world looking for an alternative but has also raised many new questions: What dangers lie ahead? What role can Venezuelan workers play? And is Venezuela heading for revolution?



## Prophet and the Proletariat \$6

**Chris Harman**

Chris Harman charts a course through the contradictions of Islamism, revealing its class roots and arguing that when the Islamists are in opposition the socialist attitude should be 'with the state never, with the Islamists sometimes'.

## Universities in a neoliberal world \$6

**Alex Callinicos**

Universities are changing. Higher education is being harnessed to the interests of big business on an unprecedented scale. Those responsible claim this is justified by the needs of a 'Knowledge economy'. Alex Callinicos challenges these claims and examines prospects for resistance to the neoliberal transformation of our universities



# Russia's sexual revolution after 1917



Left: "Women workers take up your rifles" - a Bolshevik poster calling women to arms in defence of the revolution in 1917. Sexual liberation was a central goal of the revolutionary movement

was common. A proverb ran, "Hit your wife with the butt of the axe, get down and see if she's breathing. If she is, she's shamming and wants some more."

## Change

But from the mid-19th century, Russian society began to change. The Tsar abolished serfdom – though there was no real democracy, and extreme inequality remained. Industrialisation meant rapid urbanisation in cities like Moscow and St Petersburg. Radical movements developed from the 1870s, carrying new ideas about women and sex. The novel *What is to be Done?* became the bible of the new movement. It tells the story of Vera Pavlovna who enters a fictitious marriage to escape her bourgeois parents.

The novel recounts her dreams – its finale depicts a utopia where wealth and poverty are no more, men and women are equal, and people can choose what work to do and what relationships to have. Such ideas inspired thousands of young men and women. Urbanisation also brought changes to sexual relationships. There wasn't space or money to duplicate peasant marriage and family patterns in the cities.

A homosexual sub-culture – the "little homosexual world" – emerged. Men met for sex in parks and public toilets. Wealthy men had liaisons with waiters, servants, soldiers and male prostitutes in bathhouses. Lesbians found life more difficult. Wealthy women had leisure time to spend in the literary salons, fashionable meeting places for rich lesbians. But life was harder for working class women – brothels were meeting places for "koshki", or female cats, the name given to working class lesbians. The growing working class was central to the revolutionary movement, and women increasingly played a role.

In 1905 revolution broke out, but it was defeated. In 1917 a revolution was successful, and in October the Bolshevik party took power. Men and women became equal under law, divorce was available on demand, church control of sexual behaviour was abolished and abortion was legalised.

The revolution transformed the lives of homosexuals with a flourish. All references to sex practices were removed from the Criminal Code in 1922. A sex crime was now described as an act violating the individuals' right to "life, health, freedom and dignity". Relationships based on the unfamiliar ideas of complete freedom, equality and genuine friendship flourished.

These legal reforms reflected changes in society. Peasant women sang songs about how they would divorce their husband if he beat them. A court confirmed the right of two women to marry. Of course some bigoted ideas and practices remained. Long established ideas can be hard to overcome. But the Bolsheviks strove to make the advances real – so that women, homosexuals and workers were liberated in practice.

So for example, communal dining halls were

**O**ne of the most sexually liberated societies in history developed after the 1917 revolution in Russia. Colin Wilson marked LGBT history month in February by looking at its impact on gay liberation

The Russian Revolution of 1917 changed the lives of gay men and lesbians. Russia became a beacon for workers, the poor and oppressed who saw for the first time how society could be run for the benefit of all. The very process of making the revolution, of sweeping away the existing social order, made sexual liberation and genuine equality possible.

To understand the impact of the revolution, it is

important to look at Russia before 1917. Most people lived as they had for hundreds of years – as peasants in small villages, living from the soil. Until 1861 most peasants were serfs, owned by the aristocracy. Russia was a dictatorship, ruled by the Tsar and opponents faced exile to the brutal cold of Siberia. A tiny minority of Russians lived in wealth and splendour. For example, the Sheremetevs owned 200,000 serfs and had 340 servants waiting on them.

Sex was characterised by violence and oppression and sexual behaviour was controlled by the church and state. Homosexuality was illegal. Evidence of same sex relationships existed, but they showed mainly unequal relations between upper class landowners and their male servants or peasants. Aristocratic women could not travel, work or study without their husband's permission. For peasants, marriage was for necessity and survival. A wife's tasks were to help her husband in the fields and produce children to do the same. Domestic violence



instituted – partly to ensure people were fed, and partly to liberate women from domestic labour. Through the civil war, every child in the capital got free food, and most adults ate in the dining halls as well. Prostitution was decriminalised. The government set up cooperatives to provide support for prostitutes, access to medical support and training in other kinds of work.

Dr Grigory Batkis, director of the Moscow Institute for Sexual Hygiene, led the Soviet delegation to the World League for Sexual Freedom conference in Berlin in 1923. He made clear the approach of the new society – “Soviet legislation... declares the absolute non-interference of the state and society into sexual matters, so long as no one’s interests are encroached upon. “Concerning homosexuality, sodomy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offences against public morality, Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called ‘natural’ intercourse.”

Many of the gains the revolution achieved still do not exist in some countries to this day. In Britain abortion is not available on demand, and nor is divorce. Homosexuality was illegal until 1967 and only removed from the mental health register in 1993. Many discriminatory laws against homosexuals remained on the statute books in Britain until the start of this century.

The advances in Russia were not because of

Bolshevik decrees, but because the revolution involved the vast majority of people fighting to transform society and take control of it themselves. But the lack of economic development meant that the country was too poor to sustain socialism. The Bolsheviks relied on revolution spreading to more developed countries. This was a reasonable assumption. In 1919 British prime minister Lloyd George stated that, “The whole of Europe is filled with the spirit of revolution.” Unfortunately the radicalisation failed to break through. And the victorious Russian revolution faced years of war against supporters of the Tsar, and foreign armies determined to destroy the new socialist society. This took a huge toll. It made millions of children homeless and devastated the working class.

## Stalled

The Bolsheviks had no choice but to introduce the New Economic Policy (NEP) in a bid to hold on to power until a more developed country became socialist. The policy partly reintroduced capitalism. Peasants were paid to produce grain. Limited funds meant communal dining halls were closed, as were many nurseries, which made it harder for women to work. Prostitution began to increase again. Slowly the old ways crept back. The problem was poverty and backwardness. Many peasants had never favoured divorce as their communal households centred on married couples. The Bolsheviks had

sought to liberate men and women from the constraints of the family. But for many the family was the only option – the state had no money to guarantee women a decent standard of living.

Joseph Stalin rose to power in this context of isolation and poverty. He had been a relatively minor figure in 1917, but represented an emerging class that believed the solution to Russian backwardness was to force workers and peasants to be more productive.

The state increasingly controlled and directed work and life. As under the Tsar, a woman’s main function was seen as reproduction – women with seven children received payments from the state, and those with eleven got even more money. The Stalinist government banned abortion, made divorce more difficult and recriminalised homosexuality. Gay men faced up to eight years in prison. Homosexuals were driven back into the closet and suicides rose significantly. In 1934 there were mass arrests in Moscow and other cities. Anti-homosexual discourse was used in wartime propaganda between Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany. Stalin said “eradicate homosexuality and fascism will disappear”, while Hitler labelled homosexuality a “communist degeneracy”.

Stalin’s betrayal of socialism, however, does nothing to diminish the revolutionary tradition of which the Bolsheviks were the best example. They saw the achievement of sexual liberation and the fight for a better world as inseparable.

Colin Wilson  
Socialist Worker (UK)

# School: The best days of your life?

**S***chool students have it tough: They are supposed to be enjoying unleashing their creativity ready for the 21st century knowledge economy; but when they are exercise their creativity – say by dying their hair – they are suspended.*

While this might seem a fairly trivial example of the petty tyranny of a school authority over a student, it’s something that goes on day after day, week after week in schools with grinding regularity.

Schools are highly regimented. There is a bell that tells you when to start learning, when to stop, when to eat, when to play, when to stop enjoying yourself, when to be at school and when to leave. There are rules on what to wear and what not to wear. In many schools students have to stand when a teacher enters and sit only when given permission. Modern schools were modeled on the army and are organised on the same basic pattern as other big institutions like jails and factories.

Then there is the “learning” itself. Much of it is boring and irrelevant. Tests and exams are like jumping through a series of hoops to prepare you for “the real world”, though workplaces where you are sit silently for hours on end regurgitating masses of information are rare.

Much of schooling is about discipline and habits of obedience to authority. Indeed this was the motive of many ruling class advocates of a national education system. One such advocate declared that she would teach children to read but not write:

“They learn, on weekdays, such coarse works as may fit them for servants. I allow of no writing for the poor. My object is...to train up the lower classes in habits of industry and piety... Beautiful is the order of society when each, according to his place, pays willing honour to his superiors.”

Many of these early education advocates were motivated by the need to ensure that the emerging working class had the skills to operate the machinery of the new factories and to accept the orders of foremen, bosses and policemen without question.

Of course, school is not all bad. Knowledge is power and learning is part of growing stronger. Passionate teachers strive to make learning interesting and meaningful and some innovative

programs are challenging old methods of education. People make lifelong friends at school. Many students will look back with mixed memories of their school days – the good memories of learning and friendships tempered by bad experiences of clashes with authority, bullying or social exclusion.

But education is essential to human liberation and the drive to win an education for themselves and their children has always been a burning desire within the working class movement and in third world liberation struggles. Free public primary and secondary education is a great achievement but because it is within capitalism, our education system is marred by sexism, racism and bullying. Education can be transformed though by organizing groups to study together, to resist petty tyrannies and support teachers’ unions in their defence of public education.

By David Garland  
If you are keen to get organised at your school then text Joe Baird on 027 776 4704.

# Science fiction and the South Pacific



***Despite selling out every night it screens at the cinema on Courtney Place and becoming the highest grossing film of all time, few have picked up on Avatar's blatant allusions to the historical drama of Bougainville that happened on New Zealand's doorstep thirteen years ago. The film's names, plot and characters are almost direct references to the 1997 Bougainville crisis yet no one seems to have drawn the dots between science fiction and south Pacific fact. Until now.***



**A Bougainville Revolutionary Army soldier stands over a toxic copper sulphate waterfall in Panguna mine. Poorly armed but determined Bougainville islanders fought off the corporate-backed New Guinea army. Source: Alex Smailes**

Many people will be familiar with the story of Avatar. The story opens one hundred and fifty years in the future. A human mining corporation, RDA, has come five light years from Earth to the ecologically pristine jungle wilderness of the planet Pandora to mine the mineral unobtainium. The richest deposits of unobtainium lie buried deep within the ground of Pandora and directly below the home of an alien race known as the Na'vi. Jake Sully, an ex-United States marine turned mercenary, is sent out to spy on the aliens by controlling a genetically engineered avatar. The security commander of the RDA, Colonel Miles Quaritch, encourages Sully to win the trust of the Na'vi and entice them to relocate away from their home in a giant tree, so the RDA can mine the unobtainium.

Before Sully is able to persuade the Na'vi to leave Hometree, Colonel Quaritch attacks Hometree and destroys it. Sully (in Avatar form) and a crew of RDA scientists mutiny and join the Na'vi in their struggle to rid Pandora of the RDA. The endgame battle revolves around the Na'vi defending the sacred tree of souls and the vital connection it provides to their races culture, memories and the Pandoran equivalent of earth goddess Gaia. By the end of the film the RDA are defeated and in one of the closing scenes Sully and armed Na'vi watch over a column of sullen RDA miners and their mercenaries as they are forcibly put aboard a space shuttle destined for earth.

The events that inspired Avatar writer and producer James Cameron can only have been the long guerrilla war that scarred the small south

Pacific island of Bougainville for a decade between 1988 and 1998. The armed revolt began in 1988 when a group of indigenous rebels stole explosives and sabotaged the electricity supply to the environmentally destructive Panguna copper and gold mine, opened in 1964 and controlled by the CRA, an Australian subsidiary of UK mining giant Rio Tinto. The Panguna mine was opened on land stolen from the Nasioi tribe and tailings were dumped in a nearby river, eliminating aquatic life and forcing 800 tribespeople to lose their land.

For a decade the Pacific conflict festered between the eco-guerrilla Bougainville Revolutionary Army and the ill-disciplined Papua New Guinea Defence Force. The conflict caused the deaths of between 10,000 and 20,000 Bougainvilleans, as Australian supplied gunships strafed rebel camps and civilian villages and a tight blockade left the islanders often without food or medical supplies and allowed malaria and tuberculosis to spread with impunity. The end of the conflict came in 1997 when the Papua New Guinea (PNG) government hired Sandline International, a British mercenary outfit led by former British Army Colonel Tim Spicer, to destroy the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. Sandline and the PNG government signed a secret US\$36 million contract for Sandline to provide a military solution to the Bougainville crisis that would see Sandline supply new helicopter gunships and troopships and using a mixed mercenary and PNGDF strike force, overwhelm the BRA. However, as Spicer's mercenaries landed in PNG and began training the PNGDF in preparation for the assault on Bougainville to reopen Panguna, the "Weekend Australian" journalist Mary-Louise O'Callaghan broke the story, precipitating a diplomatic crisis between PNG and Australia and widespread disgust from PNG civil society.

In the wake of Callaghan's expose, the commander of the PNGDF, Jerry Singirok, led an army coup to force the Government to cancel the contract, step aside and call new elections. Singirok went on national radio to tell the country he could not allow the Government to send foreign mercenaries armed with high-powered rocket launchers to murder in Bougainville and then disarmed the Sandline mercenaries and imprisoned Spicer. As the crisis grew and student protests in Port Moresby escalated, the Government reluctantly resigned and the Sandline soldiers were deported. In 1998 a New Zealand-brokered ceasefire was negotiated and eventually the Autonomous Bougainville Government established. The Panguna mine remains closed and in the hands of the indigenous landowners, yet foreign corporate interest in reopening the mine continues.

Cameron's plot is almost a direct adaptation of the Bougainville crisis with only the most minor adjustments. The full scale attack on Hometree in Avatar is a fair estimation of the havoc that Spicer's proposed gunship assault to open Panguna would have had on the Nasioi tribe. In the climactic battle Jake Sully leads an alliance of Na'vi tribes aided by an uprising of Pandoran wildlife sent by their planet's goddess of life, Eywa. Sully then lands on the back of the RDA space-shuttle turned carpet-bomber and uses a grenade to spin it off its flight

path, thus preventing it from destroying the sacred tree of souls. The scenario nicely symbolises how Jerry Singirok's coup blew apart the Governments plan to rain death and destruction over Bougainville, in tandem with student and union protests escalating into anti-government riots and a parliamentary siege. This uprising eventually forced Sandline to divert the flight-plan of the world's largest cargo plane, filled with grenade launchers, mortars and ammunition. The Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan resigned and the mercenaries were forced to land their deadly payload in an Australian air force base instead of in Port Moresby.

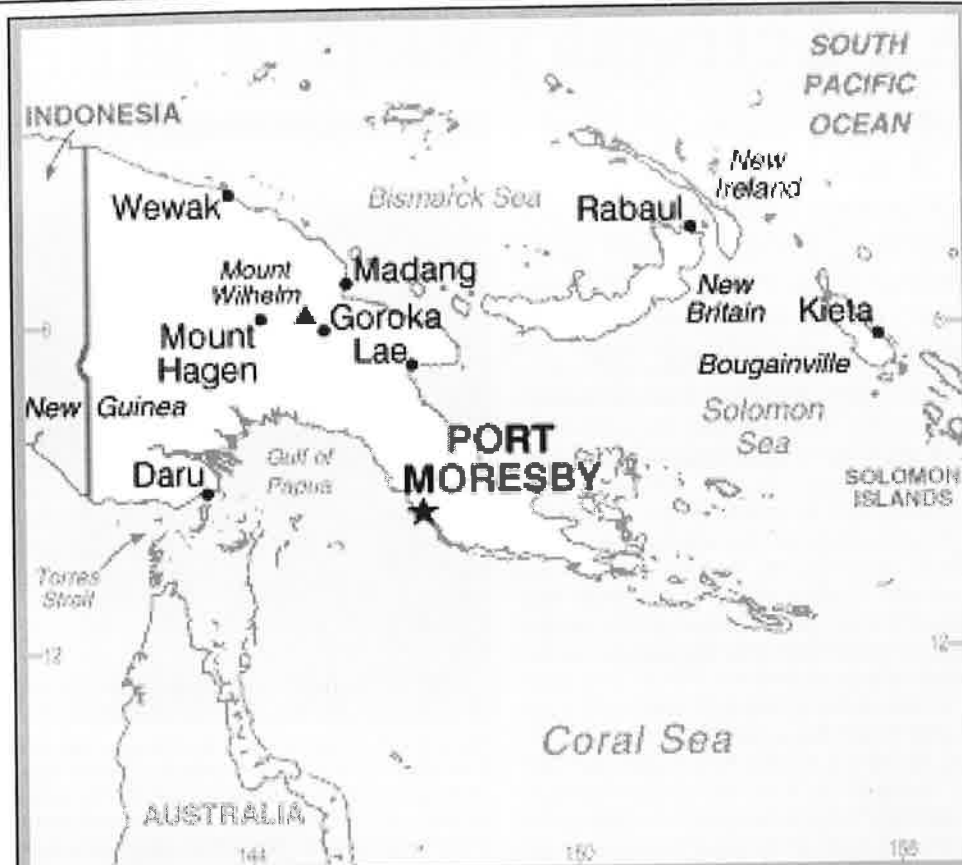
In the much discussed blogpost, "When Will White People Stop Making Movies Like 'Avatar'?" Annalee Newitz argues the film reinforces racial stereotypes because the white audience can "ignore the fundamental experience of being an oppressed racial group". What Newitz and other liberal anti-racists fail to appreciate is that the character of Jake Sully and his mutiny against the RDA is not a "white guilt fantasy" but a retelling of the story of Singirok and his army rebelling against their Government.

Sully's mutiny is also a reminder of the power of rank-and-file military desertions and mutinies to end unjust wars. The Vietnam War ground to a halt in the 1970s partly because the US military was in a "state approaching collapse" according to a US army colonel, as a result of officer killings, widespread drug use, and spiralling desertions. The reality is that over 350,000 US soldiers went AWOL in Vietnam between 1967 and 1972, and that isn't just a "white guilt fantasy". Sully should be seen not as a "white guilt fantasy" but as a white guilt fact, he represents a recurring historical figure, seen in soldiers like Singirok and John Riley, the leader of the Irish deserters from the US army in the US Mexican war (1846-8) who formed the St Patrick's Battalion and fought for the Mexicans.

Cameron has infused his film with so many allusions to the Bougainville conflict that it beggars belief that only a few have picked up on it. For example a quick reshuffle and a little transposing of the letters in "Miles Quaritch" and we get something very similar to "I am Tim Spicer". Coincidentally Cameron was developing the script a good thirteen years ago, the same time as CNN and BBC were broadcasting to the world Singirok's coup against the Sandline contract.

The story of Bougainville's bloody eco-revolution, the Sandline crisis and the overthrow of unscrupulous and corrupted PNG politicians by army revolt was always going to make an excellent film. Cameron has done justice to a little-known chapter of history that happened right here in the south Pacific. Yet just last October Rio Tinto's Bougainville company was exploring with the new Bougainville government the possibility of reopening the Panguna mine. Of course, the indigenous landowners still vehemently oppose the reopening of the mine. The sequel to Avatar may be coming sooner than many predicted. If it does, the Naisoi will need the help of as many Avatar fans as possible to keep their south Pacific "Pandora" free and unspoiled.

Omar Hamed  
Socialist Aotearoa  
socialistaotearoa.blogspot.com



## **Australian and New Zealand business interests have long dominated the island nations of the South Pacific and support each other closely. New Zealand was brought in to play "good cop" in the Bougainville ceasefire to Australia's "bad cop".**

In 2008, over half of PNG's imports were Australian products. In part this is a legacy of colonialism. But it's also because the Australian state works to promote and secure corporate dominance in what the Australian ruling class regards as its "patch". This is underscored by a damning report published by the anti-poverty group Jubilee Australia in December 2009. The report, "Risky Business", shines a spotlight on the history and recent activity of Australia's export credit agency (ECA) – the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation (EFIC). This is no independent entity, but an arm of government. Its role is to provide loans or "political risk insurance" to assist Australian companies win investment and export business overseas. Its financing decisions are based solely on two criteria – commercial viability and what advances Australia's strategic interests.

Unlike the World Bank and IMF, which have come under pressure for sponsoring unsustainable debt and imposing corporate interests on the developing world, ECAs fly under the radar despite being a larger contributor to official debt than the World Bank and IMF over the past decade.

Overwhelmingly, Australia's export credit agency has financed large-scale invasive resource extraction projects in the South Pacific, from the Panguna (Bougainville) copper mine in PNG to the Gold Ridge gold mine in the Solomon Islands. In December 2009, desperate to secure Australia's

role in the largest development project in the history of the Pacific region, EFIC announced it had committed \$US500 million in loans to the \$US15 billion Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project.

When the deal was there were claims the LNG project would be a "game changer" for PNG, doubling the nation's GDP over the 30 year life of the project and dragging its traditional communities into modernity.

"Risky Business" hoses down this hyperbole, pointing out that despite other resource booms over the past 20 years, in which Australian companies and the PNG elite have made a killing, the average person in PNG has slipped deeper into poverty. In 1996, according to the World Bank, 37.5 per cent of the population lived in poverty. In 2003, this had risen to about 54 per cent.

## **This is imperialism**

What drives the export credit agency and Ausaid is the government's determination to maintain its strategic domination of the South Pacific. In its economic competition with rival nations, the Australian government is prepared to sponsor environmental destruction and attacks on indigenous land rights in the region. Their approach is to support domestic business at any cost in the fierce world of export competition.

The Australian elite is alarmed by the growing trade relationships between China, Malaysia, Taiwan and other powers with South Pacific nations, which threaten Australian capitalism's supremacy in its so-called "backyard". China in particular has stepped up its investment in PNG. That 50 per cent of the Solomon Islands exports go to China is another example of China's growing economic importance to the region.

The tight relationship between Australian capital and the Australian state is one face of imperialism. The other face of course involves guns and soldiers. The Australian and New Zealand states are imperialist powers in the South Pacific. Their actions, whether economic or military need to be opposed by people who stand for justice.

By Liz Walsh

# An activist jailed, a killer walks free

**A** little over four years ago, in 2004, a policeman beat to death an Aboriginal man known as Mulrunji on Palm Island, in Australia's racist north Queensland. Today, the battle for justice continues.

On December 7, 2008, Aboriginal community leader Lex Wotton, a plumber and father of four, was sentenced to six years in jail after an all-white jury convicted him of "riot with destruction." His crime? Taking part in a large, militant, and completely justified community protest that erupted a week after a coroner ruled Mulrunji's death accidental. Wotton is a political prisoner, and he must be freed now.

Interviewed by the Australian Freedom Socialist Bulletin (FSB), Wotton said, "I was targeted as the ringleader in the so-called Palm Island riots. I am the scapegoat for both the federal and state governments' inaction and failure to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody."

Australian indigenous people are jailed at record rates. Although they comprise a mere 2.2 percent of Australia's population, they represent over 22 percent of the prison population and 30 percent of all deaths in custody.

On Nov. 19, 2004, Mulrunji allegedly mouthed off to police officer Chris Hurley as he was arresting another Aboriginal man on the street. Hurley arrested Mulrunji for being drunk and disorderly, beat him, and took him to jail. Mulrunji was found dead on the cell floor 40 minutes later. He had suffered head and jaw trauma, four broken ribs, and massive internal bleeding. His liver was literally cleaved in half.

When the first coroner's inquiry declared Mulrunji's death an accident — police withheld



"Oh mate, is he a criminal? See how people clap for him - that's no criminal," Aboriginal activist Murandoo Yanner said on a 2004 protest in support of Wotton. "[Premier] Peter Beattie would never get a round of applause like that from these people. Clearly he's a hero to the crowd and rightfully so." Mr Yanner told the crowd not to be afraid of going to jail for what he called an "honourable crime". "Deck that policeman hurting your brother, burn that police station protecting a murderer because that's something honourable rather than going for bashing your kids or your wife," he said. "Go for an honourable crime." Queensland Police Commissioner Bob Atkinson says "I would hate to see people like that get elevated to a level of importance or status or credibility that they really, quite frankly, don't deserve." We say "people like that", not the police, are the real heroes.

names of witnesses who had seen Chris Hurley punching Mulrunji — the community rebelled. Protesters burned down the police station, courthouse, and Hurley's police residence.

Demands to know the truth and hold those responsible to account resulted in a proper coroner's investigation in 2006 that found Hurley culpable for Mulrunji's death. More mass protests were necessary before Hurley was hauled into court, making him one of the few cops responsible for a death in custody to face trial.

But, in 2007, an all-white jury acquitted Hurley.

He was promoted, transferred to a sought-after location, and given \$100,000 to compensate for belongings lost in the fire. In contrast, Wotton, a plumber, was found guilty of rioting - along with 22 others.

By Alison Thorne for Freedom Socialist Bulletin, Australia.

## Join the Struggle

Socialist Review is a magazine produced by the International Socialist Organisation Aotearoa. It aims to provide quality political analysis that represents the interests of the working class majority in New Zealand. But unlike "alternative" media sources, we don't aim simply to provide an "antidote" to the corporate lies, imperialist wars, oppression and inequality that dominate the global landscape; we aim to put them into historical and economic context, to draw links between the various issues and the global capitalist system, and analyse what they mean for ordinary working people and the working class movement, both at home and abroad. To do this we try and maintain a healthy balance of domestic and international issues.

We also practice what we preach, and support the working class movement whenever we can, with the long-term aim of building an organisation that can provide the working class with political leadership in times of upheaval. If you're interested in our politics and want to know how you can get involved, please phone or text 027 606 9549 or email: [contact@iso.org.nz](mailto:contact@iso.org.nz) or visit our website: [www.iso.org.nz](http://www.iso.org.nz)



# Class society is a 'kleptocracy'

## GUNS, GERMS AND STEEL

A SHORT HISTORY OF EVERYBODY FOR THE LAST 13,000 YEARS



WINNER OF THE 1998 RHÔNE-POULENC SCIENCE BOOK PRIZE



JARED DIAMOND

'A book of extraordinary vision and confidence'  
Observer

"Guns, Germs and Steel" (1999) is an ambitious book. Diamond sets out to explain, in explicit opposition to racism, how Western Europe came to dominate the world.

The problem is that arguments based on the biological superiority of whites, which were so popular in the colonial period, have been exposed as rubbish. Nonetheless, the world is profoundly divided on racial lines. Africa is the most poverty-stricken region in the world and the USA and Western Europe are the wealthiest. This racial divide is reflected everywhere, from Argentina to Aotearoa.

In the last 30 years, historians influenced by

postmodernism blamed the effects of racism on racism itself – the ideology – and hunted for its origins in European history and psyche. But believing you are superior is not enough to dominate the world. I doubt there is any traditional culture that does not believe itself to be the centre of creation.

Europe's dominance, argues Diamond, can be found in a series of ecological and geographic lucky breaks. The emergence of civilisation depends on a network of factors, including, crucially, having plant and animal species that can be domesticated. The Eurasian landmass, Diamond shows, was dealt the best hand – largely but not only because it is the largest land mass.

Diamond is clear that the emergence of civilisation is not all good. Settled agriculture means surplus food can be produced, giving people leisure time to create technologies like writing, but control of that food falls into the hands of an elite. Diamond refers repeatedly to the stratified societies that result from agriculture as 'kleptocracies' (the rule of thieves) and provides an abundance of evidence for this from all over the world. It is remarkable that what was once an ideological contention of Marxists is now so firmly established by layer upon layer of scientific evidence.

Diamond has two weaknesses though; one stems from a latent commitment to Hobbesian liberalism and the other from a lack of faith in revolutionary change.

In the first case he goes to unwarranted lengths to emphasise all instances of violence in pre-class societies, drawing heavily on (often anecdotal) evidence from what was probably the most violent region in the world – the Papuan island. I would argue that in Papua three factors – low-yield agriculture, mountainous geography and a lack of trade routes – led over millennia to the establishment of geographically fixed, linguistically separate peoples with a disproportionately high level of

warfare. Diamond, either because his extensive experience in Papua has made it a norm for him or because of ideological predilections, suggests the Papuan experience shows that the transition to stratified 'kleptocracy' brought with it an escape from the constant threat of homicide (cf Hobbes' mythical state of nature, where life was 'nasty brutish and short'). While primitive communism (as Marx and Engels referred to hunter/gatherer societies) was not paradise on earth, in most cases it offered living standards that surpassed agricultural class societies but could not create technologies – especially military technology – to match more advanced societies.

Diamond's second weakness is most obvious in the (very dreary) book 'Collapse', which is an appeal to the powers-that-be to learn from history and transcend private greed. The reality is that in an economy based on self-interest, production will always be anarchic. As resources become scarce, the supply and demand mechanism of the market merely forces the price of those goods up and makes exploitation more profitable. The privatisation of water and resource wars, like the invasion of Iraq, are examples. Diamond's appeal to the powerful is doomed because they are unable to democratically plan the rational shepherding of the earth's limited resources.

On the whole, it is astounding and worrying that an intelligent, well-educated scientist could be apparently unaware that his work on the evolution of human societies follows so closely that of such well-known thinkers as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels but, on the positive side, it is testament to the continued vigour of the scientific community and the intellectual appetite of the reading public that works such as "Guns Germs and Steel" are produced.

Andrew Tait

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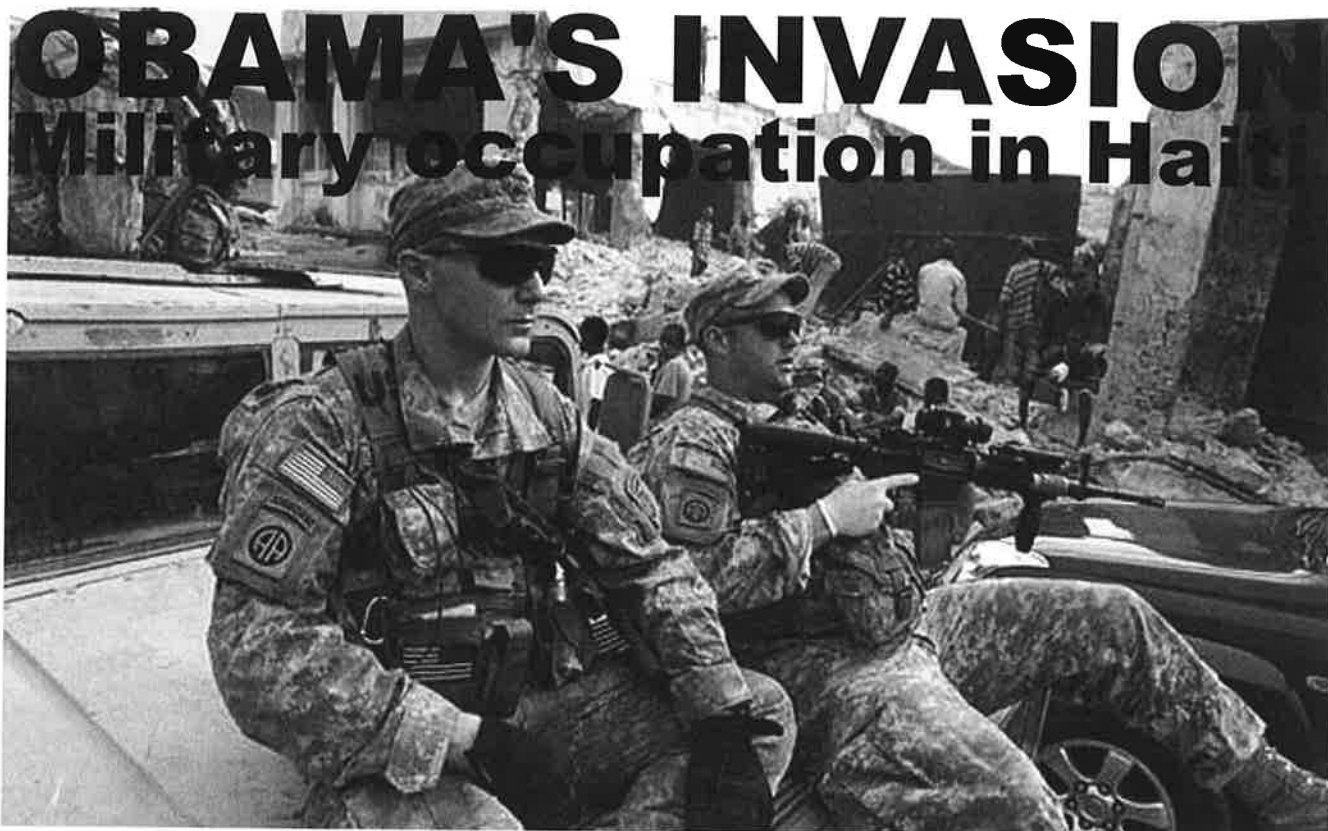
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In January, Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, was levelled by the largest earthquake in 240 years. The official death toll stands at over 230,000. Those left homeless number 2 million. The city's infrastructure has been almost completely destroyed.

All over the world, ordinary people have reacted with concern and generosity but the response of the US, Haiti's wealthy and powerful neighbour has been appalling.

President Barack Obama, who drew so effectively on his African heritage to help propel himself into power has delivered little but a slap in the face to the impoverished descendants of one of the greatest slave rebellions in history. The President's initial pledge for Haiti was \$US100 million. To put this amount in perspective, the US government has approved over \$US130 billion to continue the murderous occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Haiti's aid is equivalent to less than 0.1 per cent of this year's war chest. In Afghanistan, Obama has pledged the equivalent of \$US1.1 million per US soldier per year to escalate the occupation.

But how much of the aid is directly benefiting the population? Reports indicate very little. Instead of aid workers and health professionals, Obama has delivered an army of occupation.

Captain John Kirby, spokesman for the Joint Task Force Haiti, was forced to admit as much on 18 January. Of flights going into and out of the only functioning airport in the country, 50 per cent had

been military, rather than civilian, he said. Jarry Emmanuel, air logistics officer for the UN's World Food Program, thought the ratio higher, telling the New York Times that "most flights are for the US military".

On 18 January, the White House announced that over 11,000 military personnel "are on the ground or afloat". The UN sent 4000 troops and police to join the 13,500 who were occupying the country prior to the quake. In the same press release, they revealed they had only 265 medical personnel in the country. It took until 20 January – more than a week after the quake – for the US State Department to report that they planned to begin food distribution. Yet the amount of food they were to distribute would only "meet the immediate food needs of 18,670 families, or approximately 93,350 individuals". That's less than 5 per cent of the homeless population.

Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) had five planes carrying 85 tonnes of medical aid and equipment diverted by the US military. At the same time, hospitals lay in ruins with hundreds of medical staff crushed under the rubble. US doctor Mark Hyman told the Huffington Post how first medical amputations were occurring "without water, electricity, or disinfectant. They used a rusty hacksaw we washed with vodka, lit by camping headlamps in an empty room with a few boxes of supplies we had packed into our plane".

***Continued on p. 15***